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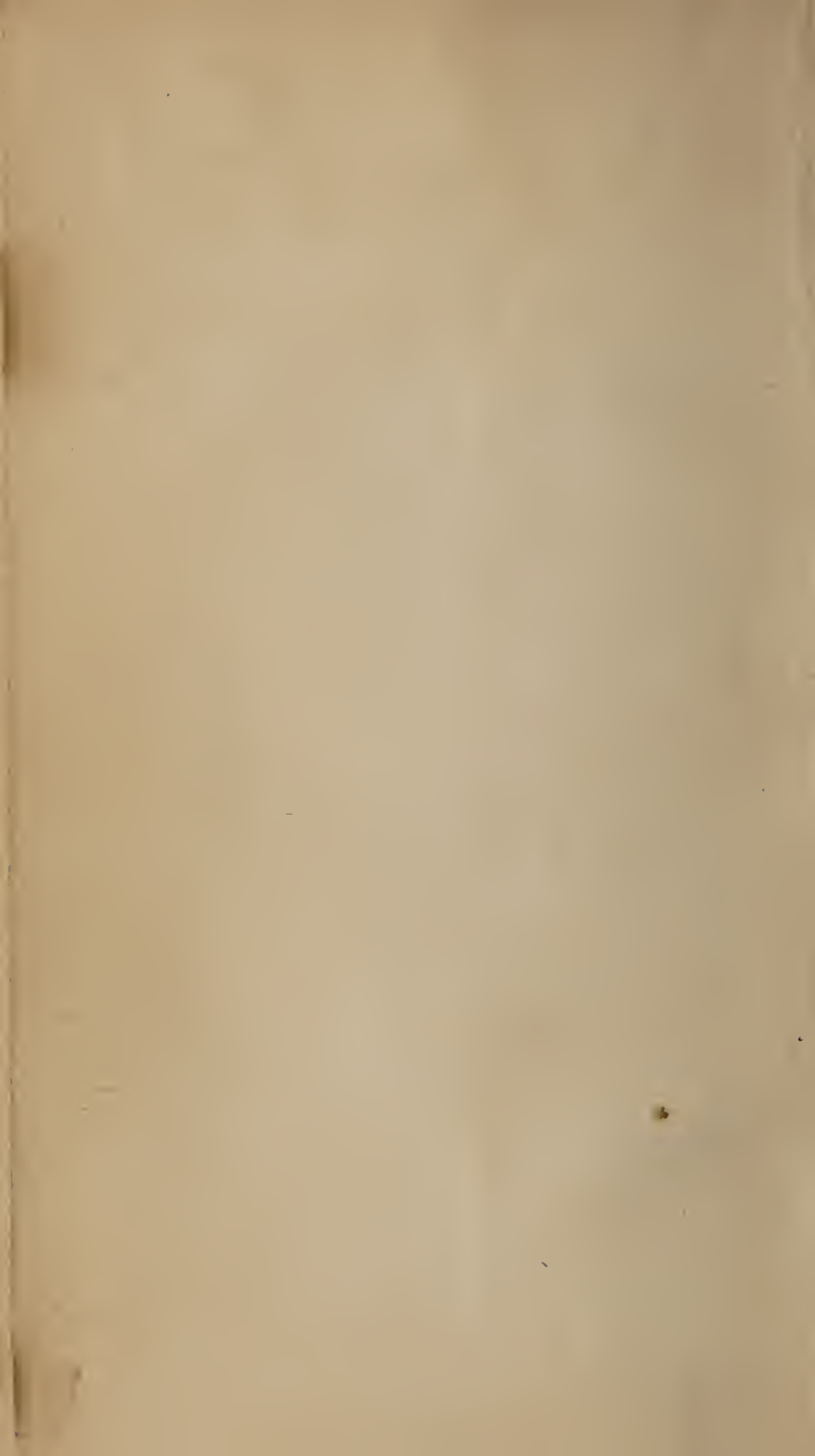
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THE
Life of GOD
IN THE
SOUL of MAN:
OR, THE
NATURE and EXCELLENCY
OF THE
CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

WITH
The METHODS of attaining the *Hap-
piness* which it proposes.

ALSO
An Account of the *Beginnings* and *Advances* of a
SPIRITUAL LIFE.

With a PREFACE,
By GILBERT BURNET,
Late Lord Bishop of Sarum.

Eph. iv. 18. *Alienated from the Life of God.*

Gal. ii. 20. *I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live;
yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.*

Rom. viii. 14. *For as many as are led by the Spirit of God,
they are the Sons of God.*

The TENTH EDITION, carefully corrected.

L O N D O N:

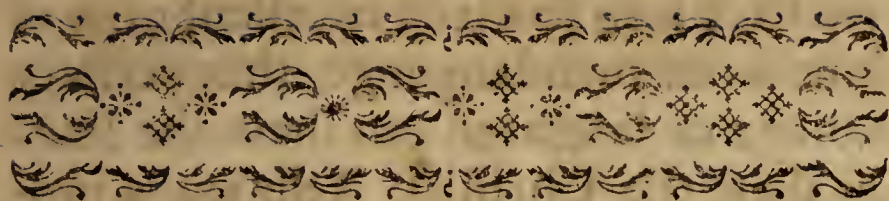
Printed for JOHN RIVINGTON, Bookseller to the
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Paul's Church-yard. 1769.

110.344.

Mrs. M. S. Mason

110,344

Dec. 6, 1870.



T H E

P R E F A C E.

THIS age groans under such a surcharge of new books, that though the many good ones lately published do much balance the great swarms of ill, or at least needless ones; yet all men complain of the unnecessary charge and trouble many new books put them to: the truth of it is, printing is become a trade, and the presses must be kept going; so that if it were but to shuffle out an ill book, a man may be tempted to keep them at work.

AND for books of devotion and piety, we have seen so many excellent ones of late in our own language, that perhaps no age or language can shew the like: in these the Christian Religion is proposed in its own true and natural colours, and rescued from those false representations many are apt to make of it; as if it consisted either in external performances, or in mechanical heats of the fancy, or in embracing some opinions or interests. *It is and can be nothing else, but a design to make us like God, both in the inward temper of our minds, and in our whole deportment and conversation.* For this end did Christ both live and die; this he taught by his discourses, and discovered in his life. He died that he might take away sin, and not only or chiefly to procure our pardon; which was done by him for a further end, that an universal indemnity being offered through his death, all mankind might be thereby encouraged to enter into a course of holy obedience, with all possible advantages, having the hopes of endless happiness, and the fears of eternal misery
before

before them ; having the clearest rule, and the most unblemished example proposed to them ; being also sure of constant inward supplies to support and strengthen their endeavours, and an unerring Providence to direct all things that concern them. Nor are there any precepts in this whole doctrine, whose fitness and true excellency, besides the authority of the lawgiver, has not been fully made good : and the truth of the principles of natural religion, and of the revelation of the counsel of God in Scripture, was never, since miracles ceased, demonstrated with fuller and clearer evidence than in our age, both for stopping the mouths of all daring hectors, and for silencing the secret doubtings of more inquisitive minds. And though so grave a subject should have been rather prejudiced than adorned, by artificial and forced strains of wit and eloquence, yet as our language was never chaster than now, so these subjects have been handled with all the proper decencies of easy wit and good language.

BUT after all this, into what a torrent of grief and lamentation must we break out, when we consider the age we live in! for few do either believe, or reflect on those great things: and, as if there were a general conspiracy against God and religion, how does the greater part among us break loose from all the ties and bonds of that yoke that is light and easy, and inflave themselves to many base and hurtful lusts and passions? And are not satisfied with being as bad as they can be, but desire that all the world may esteem them such, and glory in their shame; and inhance their guilt by turning factors for hell, studying to corrupt all about them. This sad prospect must needs deeply affect all that either truly love God, or have a tender compassion for the souls of men; and will certainly set them to their secret mournings, and wrestlings with God, to avert the heavy judgments that seem to hang over our heads, and that he may of his great mercy turn the hearts of the froward and disobedient to the wisdom of the just.

AND

AND till God arise and bless his gospel with more of this success, nothing could be such an effectual means for convincing the world of the truth and excellency of our most holy faith, as, that those who profess and embrace it, did walk in all the strictness of a most holy, innocent, and exemplary life; keeping the due mean, between the affectation of moroseness and hypocrisy, and the levities of irreligion and folly. This is the only argument that is wanting, to convince the world of the truth of our religion: all people are more wrought on by lively examples set before their eyes, than by any discourses or reasonings, how strong or convincing soever: the one is more easily apprehended, and leaves a deeper impression than the other, which does not prevail on us, till by frequent and serious reflections we be satisfied about them; and when we hear any one speak well we are not assured he thinks as he says, but do often suspect he is shewing his wit or eloquence to our cost, that he may persuade us into some opinions that may prove gainful to himself. But

when we see a man pursuing a constant course of holiness, in the most painful instances, which do most prejudice his visible interests, we have all the reason to believe he is in good earnest persuaded of those truths, which engage him to such a conversation.

AFTER the ages of miracles, nothing prevailed so much on the world as the exemplary lives, and the painful martyrdoms of the Christians; which made all sorts of people look with amazement on that doctrine, that wrought so powerfully on all ranks; and did raise persons of the meanest educations and dispositions, and of the weaker sex and tenderer age, to do and suffer beyond what their greatest heroes and most celebrated philosophers had ever done. And in those days, the apologists for the Christian religion did appeal to the lives of the Christians, to prove their doctrine to be holy; concluding, that there could be nothing but good in that doctrine which made all its votaries such. But alas! when we write apologies, we must appeal from the lives of most that pretend to be
 reli-

religious, to the rules and precepts of our most holy faith, and must decline the putting the trial of Christianity upon that issue: and though, thanks be to God, there are beautiful and shining instances of the power of religion among us; yet, alas! there be too few of them, and they lie hid in a vast mixture of others that are naught.

THE two great prejudices the tribes of libertines and ruffians are hardened in against religion, are, first, That they do not see those that profess they believe the truths of religion, live like men that do so in good earnest: and I have known them say, that did they believe the great God governed all human affairs, and did know all we do, and would call us to an account for it, and reward or punish accordingly in an endless and unchangeable state, they could not live as the greater part of Christians do; but would presently renounce all the vanities and follies of this world, and give themselves up wholly to an holy and exact course of life. Secondly, The other prejudice is, That as for those in whose deportment

A 5

they

they find little to blame, yet they have great cause of suspecting there is some hidden design under it, which will break out when there is a fit opportunity for it: and they conclude, that such persons are either secretly as bad as others, only disguising it by a more decent deportment, or that all they do is a force upon themselves, for some secret end or other. And if there be some on whom they can fasten neither of these (as it is hardly possible but one that is resolved to possess himself with prejudices, will either find or pretend some colours for them) then at last they judge such persons are morose and sullen, and that they find (either from the disposition of their body or their education) as much satisfaction in such their sour gravity, as others do in all their wanton and extravagant follies.

THESE prejudices, especially the first, must be discussed by real confutations; and the strict conduct of our lives, as well as our grave and solemn devotions, must shew we are overruled by a strong belief of the authority of that law, which governs our whole actions.

actions. Nor will our abstaining from gross immoralities be argument enough, since even decency may prevail so far (though, alas! never so little as now, when fools do so generally mock at the shame and sense of sin, as if that were only the peevishness of a strict and illiberal education) but we must abstain from all those things that are below the gravity of a Christian, and which strengthen a corrupt generation in their vices. What signifies endless gaming, especially when joined with so much avarice and passion as accompany it generally; but that people know not how to dispose of their time, and therefore must play it away, idly, at best? What shall be said of those constant crowds at plays (*especially when the stage is so defiled with atheism, and all sorts of immorality*) but that so many persons know not how to fill up so many hours of the day, and therefore this contrivance must serve to waste them, and they must feed their eyes and ears with debauching objects, which will either corrupt their minds, or at least fill their imaginations with very defiling and hateful representations?

as if there were not a sufficient growth of ill thoughts ready to spring up within us, but this must be cultivated and improved by art. What are those perpetual visits, in the giving or receiving of which, most spend the better half of the time in which they are awake? and how trifling, at best, but generally how hurtful, the discourses that pass in those visits are, I leave to those who live in them to declare. How much time is spent in vain dressing? (not to mention those indecent arts of painting, and other contrivances to corrupt the world) and all either to feed vanity, or kindle lust. And after all this, many that live in these things desire to be thought good Christians, are constant at church, and frequent at the Sacrament. What wonder then, if our libertines, seeing such things in persons that pass for very religious, and having wit enough to discern that such a deportment does not agree with the belief of an account to be made for all **we** do, conclude; they do not believe it, otherwise they would not behave themselves as they do. Some failures now and then could not justify such an inference, but a habit and course
of

of those things, is an argument against the reality of that belief, which I confess I cannot answer.

BUT when we have got so far as to escape those things that are blame-worthy, it is far from being all we must aim at: it is not enough not to be ill; we must be good, and express it in all the instances which our state of life and circumstances call for. Doing good to all, forgiving injuries, comforting all in trouble, supplying the necessities of the poor; but chiefly, studying to advance the good of all peoples souls as much as we can, improving whatever interest we have in any persons to this end, of raising them to a sense of God and another life: the chief motive we offer to this, being the unaffected strictness of our own deportment, which will make all our discourses have the greater weight and force in them.

AND for the other prejudices, it is true, there is no fence or security against jealousy, yet we ought carefully to avoid every thing that may be an occasion of it; as all secret converse with suspected persons,

persons, the doing any thing (that without sin we may forbear) which is singular, or may bring a disesteem on others, or make us be observed or talked of; and, in a word, to shun all forced gestures, or modes of speech, and every thing that is not native and genuine: for let men think what they will, nothing that is constrained can ever become so natural but it will appear lothesome and affected to others; which must needs afford matter of jealousy and disesteem, especially to all prying and critical observers.

WERE there many who did live thus, the Atheists would be more convinced, at least more ashamed and out of countenance, than the most learned writings or laboured sermons will ever make them; especially if a spirit of universal love and goodness did appear more among Christians, and those factions and animosities were laid aside, which both weaken the inward vitals of holiness, and expose them to the scorn of their adversaries, and make them an easy prey to every aggressor: There is scarce a more unaccountable
 thing

thing to be imagined, than to see a company of men professing a religion, (one great and main precept whereof is mutual love, forbearance, gentleness of spirit, and compassion to all sorts of persons) and agreeing in all the essential parts of its doctrine, and differing only in some less material and more disputable things, yet maintaining those differences with a zeal so disproportioned to the value of them, and prosecuting all that disagree from them with all possible violence; or if they want means to use outward force, with all bitterness of spirit. They must needs astonish every impartial beholder, and raise great prejudices against such persons religion, as made up of contradictions; professing love, but breaking out in all the acts of hatred.

BUT the deep sense I have of these things has carried me too far; my design in this Preface being only to introduce the following discourse, which was written by a pious and learned countryman of mine, for the private use of a noble Friend of his, without the least design of making it more public.

Others

Others seeing it, were much taken both with the excellent purposes it contained, and the great clearness and pleasantness of the stile, the natural method, and the shortness of it, and desired it might be made a more public good; and knowing I had some interest with the Author, it was referred to me, whether it should lie in a private closet, or be let go abroad. I was not long in suspense, having read it over; and the rather, knowing so well as I do, that the Author has written out nothing here but what he himself did well feel and know; and therefore it being a transcript of those divine impressions that are upon his own heart, I hope the native and unforced genuineness of it, will both more delight and edify the reader. I know these things have been often discoursed with great advantages both of reason, wit, and eloquence; but the more witnesses that concur in sealing these divine truths with their testimonies, the more evidence is thereby given.

It was upon this account that the Author having seen a letter written by a friend

friend of his to a person of great honour, but of far greater worth, “of the rise and progress of a Spiritual Life,” (wherein, as there were many things which he had not touched, so in those things of which they both discourse, the harmony was so great, that he believed they would mutually strengthen one another) was earnest with his friend that both might go abroad together: and the other pressing him to let his discourse be published, he would not yield to it, unless he granted the same consent for his.

AND so the reader has both, the one after the other; which he is desired to peruse with some degrees of the same seriousness in which they were both penned, and then it is presumed he will not repent him of his pains.

G. BURNET.



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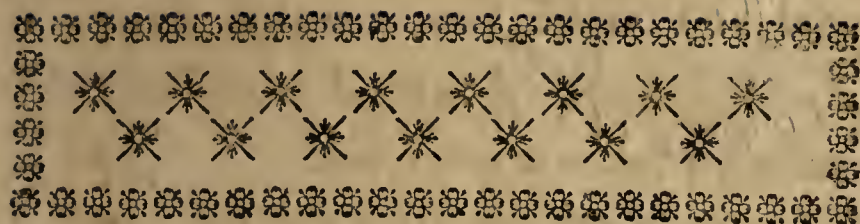
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T H E

L I F E of G O D

I N T H E

S O U L of M A N.

My Dear F R I E N D,

* * * * * H I S designation doth give you
 * T * a title to all the en-
 * * * deavours whereby I. The occasion
 * * * can serve your in- of this Dis-
 course.
 terefts ; and your pious in-
 clinations do so happily conspire with my
 duty, that I shall not need to step out of my
 road to gratify you ; but I may at once per-
 form an office of friendship, and discharge an
 B exercise

exercise of my function, since the advancing of virtue and holiness (which I hope you make your greatest study) is the peculiar business of my employment. This therefore is the most proper instance wherein I can vent my affection, and express my gratitude towards you, and I shall not any longer delay the performance of the promise I made you to this purpose; for though I know you are provided with better helps of this nature, than any I can offer you; nor are you like to meet with any thing here which you knew not before, yet I am hopeful, that what cometh from one whom you are pleased to honour with your friendship, and which is more particularly designed for your use, will be kindly accepted by you, and God's providence perhaps may so direct my thoughts, that something or other may prove useful to you. Nor shall I doubt your pardon, if for moulding my discourse into the better frame, I lay a low foundation, beginning with the nature and properties of Religion, and all along give such way to my thoughts in the prosecution of the subject, as may bring me to say many things which were not necessary, did I only consider to whom I am writing.

Mistakes about Religion.

I CANNOT speak of Religion, but I must lament that among so many pretenders
to

to it, so few understand what it means; some placing it in the understanding, in orthodox notions and opinions, and all the account they can give of their religion is, that they are of this or the other persuasion, and have joined themselves to one of those many sects whereinto Christendom is most unhappily divided. Others place it in the outward man, in a constant course of external duties, and a model of performances; if they live peaceably with their neighbours, keep a temperate diet, observe the returns of worship, frequenting the church, or their closet, and sometimes extend their hands to the relief of the poor, they think they have sufficiently acquitted themselves. Others again put all religion in the affections, in rapturous heats and extatic devotion, and all they aim at, is to pray with passion, and think of heaven with pleasure, and to be affected with those kind and melting expressions wherewith they court their Saviour, till they persuade themselves that they are mightily in love with him, and from thence assume a great confidence of their salvation, which they esteem the chief of Christian graces. Thus are those things which have any resemblance of piety, and at the best are but means of obtaining it, or particular exercises of it, frequently mistaken for the whole of religion: nay, sometimes wickedness and vice pretend to that name. I speak not now

of those gross impieties wherewith the heathens were wont to worship their gods: there are but too many Christians who would consecrate their vices, and hallow their corrupt affections, whose rugged humour, and sullen pride, must pass for Christian severity; whose fierce wrath, and bitter rage against their enemies, must be called holy zeal; whose petulancy towards their superiors, or rebellion against their governors, must have the name of Christian courage and resolution.

What Religion is.

BUT certainly religion is quite another thing, and they who are acquainted with it, will entertain far different thoughts, and disdain all those shadows and false imitations of it: They know by experience that true religion is an union of the soul with God, a real participation of the divine nature, the very image of God drawn upon the soul; or, in the Apostle's phrase, *it is Christ formed within us*. Briefly, I know not how the nature of religion can be more fully expressed than by calling it *a divine life*; and under these terms I shall discourse of it, shewing first how it is called *a life*, and then how it is termed *divine*.

The permanency and stability of Religion.

I CHOOSE to express it by the name of *life*, first because of its permanency

cy and stability : Religion is not a sudden start, or passion of the mind, not though it should rise to the height of a rapture, and seem to transport a man to extraordinary performances. There are few but have convictions of the necessity of doing something for the salvation of their souls, which may push them forward some steps with a great deal of seeming haste, but anon they flag and give over ; they were in a hot mood, but now they are cooled ; they did shoot forth fresh and high, but are quickly withered, because they had no root in themselves. These sudden fits may be compared to the violent and convulsive motions of bodies newly beheaded, caused by the agitations of the animal spirits, after the soul is departed, which, however violent and impetuous, can be of no long continuance ; whereas the motions of holy souls are constant and regular, proceeding from a permanent, and lively principle. It is true, this divine life continueth not always in the same strength and vigour, but many times suffers sad decays, and holy men find greater difficulty in resisting temptations, and less alacrity in the performance of their duties ; yet it is not quite extinguished, nor are they abandoned to the power of those corrupt affections, which sway and over-rule the rest of the world.

The freedom and unconstrainedness of Religion.

A G A I N, Religion may be designed by the name of *life*, because it is an inward, free, and self-moving principle, and those who have made progress in it, are not actuated only by external motives, driven merely by threatnings, nor bribed by promises, nor constrained by laws; but are powerfully inclined to that which is good, and delight in the performance of it: the love which a pious man bears to God and goodness, is not so much by virtue of a command enjoining him so to do, as by a new nature instructing and prompting him to it; nor doth he pay his devotions as an unavoidable tribute, only to appease the divine justice, or quiet his clamorous conscience, but those religious exercises are the proper emanations of the divine life, the natural employments of the new-born soul. He prays, and gives thanks, and repents, not only because these things are commanded, but rather because he is sensible of his wants, and of the divine goodness, and of the folly and misery of a sinful life; his charity is not forced, nor his alms extorted from him, his love makes him willing to give; and though there were no outward obligation, his *heart would devise liberal things*; injustice or intemperance, and all other vices, are as contrary to his temper and constitution, as the basest

est actions are to the most generous spirit; and impudence and scurrility to those who are naturally modest: so that I may well say with St John, * *Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin: for his seed remaineth in him, and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.* Though holy and religious persons do much eye the law of God, and have a great regard unto it, yet it is not so much the sanction of the law, as its reasonableness and purity, and goodness, which do prevail with them; they account it excellent and desirable in itself, and that in keeping of it there is great reward; and that divine love wherewith they are actuated, makes them become a law unto themselves.

Quis legem det amantibus?

Major est amor lex ipse sibi.

Who shall prescribe a law to those that love?

Love's a more powerful law which doth them move.

IN a word, what our blessed Saviour said of himself, is in some measure applicable to his followers, † *that it is their meat and drink to do their Father's will:* and as the natural appetite is carried out toward food, though we should not reflect on the necessity of it for the preservation of our lives; so are they carried with a natural and unforced propension towards that which is good and commendable. It is true, ex-

B 4

ternal

* 1 John iii. 9. † John iv. 34.

ternal motives are many times of great use to excite and stir up this inward principle, especially in its infancy and weakness, when it is often so languid, that the man himself can scarce discern it, hardly being able to move one step forward, but when he is pushed by his hopes, or his fears, by the pressure of an affliction, or the sense of a mercy, by the authority of the law, or the persuasion of others. Now if such a person be conscientious and uniform in his obedience, and earnestly groaning under the sense of his dulness, and is desirous to perform his duties with more spirit and vigour; these are the first motions of a divine life, which though it be faint and weak, will surely be cherished by the influences of heaven, and grow unto greater maturity. But he who is utterly destitute of this inward principle, and doth not aspire unto it, but contents himself with those performances whereunto he is prompted by education or custom, by the fear of hell, or carnal notions of heaven, can no more be accounted a religious person, than a puppet can be called a man. This forced and artificial religion is commonly heavy and languid, like the motion of a weight forced upward: it is cold and spiritless, like the uneasy compliance of a wife married against her will, who carries it dutifully toward the husband whom she doth not love, out of some sense of virtue and honour,

honour. Hence also this religion is scant and niggardly, especially in those duties which do greatest violence to mens carnal inclinations, and those slavish spirits will be sure to do no more than is absolutely required; it is a law that compels them, and they will be loth to go beyond what it stints them to, nay, they will ever be putting such glosses on it, as may leave themselves the greatest liberty: whereas the spirit of true religion is frank and liberal, far from such peevish and narrow reckoning; and he who hath given himself intirely unto God, will never think he doth too much for him.

Religion a divine principle.

BY this time I hope it doth appear, that religion is with a great deal of reason termed *a life*, or vital principle, and that it is very necessary to distinguish betwixt it, and that obedience which is constrained, and depends on external causes: I come next to give an account why I designed it by the name of *divine life*; and so it may be called, not only in regard of its fountain and original, having God for its author, and being wrought in the souls of men by the power of his holy spirit; but also in regard of its nature, religion being a resemblance of the divine perfections, the image of the Almighty shining in the soul of man: nay, it is a real participation of

his nature, it is a beam of the eternal light, a drop of that infinite ocean of goodness ; and they who are endued with it, may be said to have *God dwelling in their souls, and Christ formed within them.*

What the natural life is.

BEFORE I descend to a more particular consideration of that divine life wherein true religion doth consist, it will perhaps be fit to speak a little of that natural or animal life which prevails in those who are strangers to the other : and by this I understand nothing else, but our inclination and propension towards those things which are pleasing and acceptable to nature : or self-love issuing forth and spreading itself into as many branches as men have several appetites and inclinations : the root and foundation of the animal life I reckon to be *sense*, taking it largely, as it is opposed unto faith, and importeth our perception and sensation of things that are either grateful or troublesome to us. Now these animal affections considered in themselves, and as they are implanted in us by nature, are not vicious or blameable, nay, they are instances of the wisdom of the Creator furnishing his creatures with such appetites as tend to the preservation and welfare of their lives. These are instead of a law unto the brute beasts, whereby they are directed towards the ends for which

which they were made; but man being made for higher purposes, and to be guided by more excellent laws, becomes guilty and criminal when he is so far transported by the inclinations of this lower life, as to violate his duty, or neglect the higher and more noble designs of his creation. Our natural affections are not wholly to be extirpated and destroyed, but only to be moderated and over-ruled by a superior and more excellent principle. In a word, the difference betwixt a religious and wicked man, is, that in the one divine life bears sway, in the other the animal life doth prevail.

The different tendencies of the natural life:

BUT it is strange to observe, unto what different courses this natural principle will sometimes carry those who are wholly guided by it, according to the divers circumstances that concur with it to determine them: and then not considering this doth frequently occasion very dangerous mistakes, making men think well of themselves by reason of that seeming difference which is betwixt them and others, whereas perhaps their actions do all the while flow from one and the same original. If we consider the natural temper, and constitution of mens souls, we shall find some to be airy, frolicksome and light, which makes their behaviour extravagant
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and ridiculous ; whereas others are naturally serious and severe, and their whole carriage composed into such gravity as gains them a great deal of reverence and esteem. Some are of a humourfome, rugged, and morose temper, and can neither be pleased themselves, nor endure that others should be so ; but all are not born with such sour and unhappy dispositions, for some persons have a certain sweetness and benignity rooted in their natures, and they find the greatest pleasure in the endearments of society, and the mutual complacency of friends, and covet nothing more than to have every body obliged to them : and it is well that nature hath provided this complectional tenderness to supply the defect of true charity in the world, and to incline men to do something for one another's welfare. Again, in regard of education, some have never been taught to follow any other rules, than those of pleasure or advantage ; but others are so inured to observe the strictest rules of decency and honour, and some instances of virtue, that they are hardly capable of doing any thing which they have been accustomed to look upon as base and unworthy.

I N fine, it is no small difference in the deportment of meer natural men, that doth arise from the strength or weakness of their wit or judgment, and from their care or negligence in using them. Intemperance

perance and lust, injustice and oppression, and all those other impieties which abound in the world, and render it so miserable, are the issues of self-love, the effect of the *animal life*, when it is neither overpowered by religion, nor governed by natural reason; but if it once take hold of reason, and get judgment and wit to be of its party, it will many times disdain the grosser sort of vices, and spring up unto fair imitations of virtue and goodness. If a man have but so much reason as to consider the prejudice which intemperance and inordinate lust do bring unto his health, his fortune, and his reputation, self-love may suffice to restrain him; and one may observe the rules of moral justice in dealing with others, as the best way to secure his own interest, and maintain his credit in the world. But this is not all, this natural principle by the help of reason may take a higher flight, and come nigher the instances of piety and religion: it may incline a man to the diligent study of divine truths; for why should not these, as well as other speculations, be pleasant and grateful to curious and inquisitive minds? It may make men zealous in maintaining and propagating such opinions as they have espoused, and be very desirous that others should submit unto their judgment, and approve the choice of religion which themselves have made; it may make them de-

light

light to hear and compose excellent discourses about the matters of religion ; for eloquence is very pleasant whatever be the subject ; nay, some it may dispose to no small height of sensible devotion. The glorious things that are spoken of heaven, may make even a carnal heart in love with it, the metaphors and similitudes made use of in Scripture, of crowns and scepters, and rivers of pleasure, &c. will easily affect a man's fancy, and make him wish to be there, though he neither understand nor desire those spiritual pleasures which are described and shadowed forth by them : and when such a person comes to believe that Christ has purchased those glorious things for him, he may feel a kind of tenderness and affection towards so great a benefactor, and imagine that he is mightily enamoured with him ; and yet all the while continue a stranger to the holy temper and spirit of the blessed Jesus : and what hand the natural constitution may have in the rapturous devotions of some melancholy persons, hath been excellently discovered of late by several learned and judicious pens.

To conclude ; There is nothing proper to make a man's life pleasant, or himself eminent and conspicuous in the world, but this natural principle, assisted by wit and reason, may prompt him to it ; and tho' I do not condemn these things in themselves,

selves, yet it concerns us nearly to know and consider their nature, both that we may keep within due bounds, and also that we may learn never to value ourselves on the account of such attainments, nor lay the stress of religion upon our natural appetites or performances.

Wherein the divine life doth consist.

IT is now time to return to the consideration of that *divine life* whereof I was discoursing before, that *life which is hid with Christ in God*, and therefore hath no glorious shew or appearance in the world, and to the natural man will seem a mean and insipid notion. As the animal life consisteth in that narrow and confined love which is terminated on a man's self, and in his propension towards those things that are pleasing to nature; so the divine life stands in an universal and unbounded affection, and in the mastery over our natural inclinations, that they may never be able to betray us to those things which we know to be blameable. The root of the divine life is faith; the chief branches are love to God, charity to man, purity and humility: for (as an excellent person hath well observed) however these names be common and vulgar, and make no extraordinary sound, yet do they carry such a mighty sense, that the tongue of man or angel can pronounce nothing more weighty
or

or excellent. *Faith* hath the same place in the divine life which *sense* hath in the natural, being indeed nothing else but a kind of sense, or feeling persuasion of spiritual things: it extends itself unto all divine truths; but in our lapsed estate, it hath a peculiar relation to the declarations of God's mercy and reconcileableness to sinners through a Mediator, and therefore receiving its denomination from that principal object, is ordinarily termed *faith in Jesus Christ*.

THE *love* of God is a delightful and affectionate sense of the divine perfections, which makes the soul resign and sacrifice itself wholly unto him, desiring above all things to please him, and delighting in nothing so much as in fellowship and communion with him, and being ready to do or suffer any thing for his sake, or at his pleasure. Though this affection may have its first rise from the favours and mercies of God towards ourselves, yet doth it in its growth and progress transcend such particular considerations, and ground itself on his infinite goodness manifested in all the works of creation and providence. A soul thus possessed with divine love, must needs be enlarged towards all mankind in a sincere and unbounded affection, because of the relation they have to God, being his creatures, and having something of his image stamped upon them: and this is
that

that *charity* I named as the second branch of Religion, and under which all the parts of justice, all the duties we owe to our neighbour, are eminently comprehended: for he who doth truly love all the world, will be nearly concerned in the interest of every one, and so far from wronging or injuring any person, that he will resent any evil that befalls others, as if it happened to himself.

By *purity*, I understand a due abstractedness from the body, and mastery over the inferior appetites: or such a temper and disposition of mind, as makes a man despise and abstain from all pleasures and delights of sense or fancy which are sinful in themselves, or tend to extinguish or lessen our relish of more divine and intellectual pleasures, which doth also infer a resoluteness to undergo all those hardships he may meet with in the performance of his duty: so that not only chastity and temperance, but also Christian courage and magnanimity, may come under this head.

HUMILITY imports a deep sense of our own meanness, with a hearty and affectionate acknowledgment of our owing all that we are to the divine bounty; which is always accompanied with a profound submission to the will of God, and great deadness towards the glory of the world, and applause of men.

T H E S E

THESE are the highest perfections that either men or angels are capable of, the very foundation of heaven laid in the soul; and he who hath attained them, needs not desire to pry into the hidden rolls of, God's decrees, or search the volumes of heaven to know what is determined about his everlasting condition; but he may find a copy of God's thoughts concerning him written in his own breast. His love to God may give him assurance of God's favour to him, and those beginnings of happiness which he feels in the conformity of the powers of his soul to the nature of God, and compliance with his will, are a sure pledge that his felicity shall be perfected, and continued to all eternity: and it is not without reason that one said, *I had rather see the real impressions of a God-like nature upon my own soul, than have a vision from heaven, or an angel sent to tell me that my name were enrolled in the book of life.*

Religion better understood by actions than by words.

WHEN we have said all that we can, the secret mysteries of a new nature and divine life can never be sufficiently expressed; language and words cannot reach them: nor can they be truly understood but by those souls that are enkindled within, and awakened unto the sense and relish of spiritual things, *There is a spirit in man, and*
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the inspiration of the Almighty giveth this understanding. The power and life of religion may be better expressed in actions than in words, because actions are more lively things, and do better represent the inward principle whence they proceed, and therefore we may take the best measure of those gracious endowments, from the deportment of those in whom they reside, especially as they are perfectly exemplified in the holy life of our blessed Saviour, a main part of whose business in this world, was to teach by his practice what he did require of others, and to make his own conversation an exact resemblance of those unparalleled rules which he prescribed: so that if ever true goodness was visible to mortal eyes, it was then when his presence did beautify and illustrate this lower world.

*Divine love exemplified in our Saviour,
His diligence in doing Good's will, and
His patience in bearing it.*

T H A T sincere and devout affection wherewith his blessed soul did constantly burn towards his heavenly Father, did express itself in an entire resignation to his will, it was his *very meat to do the will and finish the work of him that sent him.* This was the exercise of his childhood, and the constant employment of his riper age; he spared no travail or pains while he was about his Father's business, but took such infinite content and satisfaction in the perform-

performance of it, that when, being faint and weary with his journey, he rested himself on *Jacob's* well, and intreated water of the *Samaritan* woman; the success of his conference with her, and the accession that was made to the kingdom of God, filled his mind with such delight, as seemed to have redounded to his very body, refreshing his spirits, and making him forget the thirst whereof he complained before, and refuse the meat which he had sent his disciples to buy. Nor was he less patient and submissive in suffering the will of God, than diligent in doing of it: he endured the sharpest afflictions and extreamest miseries that ever were inflicted on any mortal, without a repining thought, or discontented word. For though he was far from a stupid insensibility, or a fantastic or stoical obstinacy, and had as quick a sense of pain as other men, and the deepest apprehension of what he was to suffer in his soul, (as his *bloody sweat*, and the *fore amazement* and *sorrow* which he profess'd, do abundantly declare) yet did he intirely submit to that severe dispensation of providence, and willingly acquiesced in it.

AND he prayed to God, that *if it were possible* (or as one of the Evangelists hath it, *if he were willing*) *that cup might be removed*; yet he gently added, *nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done*. Of what
strange

strange importance are the expressions, *John xii. 27.* Where he first acknowledgeth the anguish of his spirit, *now is my soul troubled*, which would seem to produce a kind of demur, *and what shall I say*; and then he goes on to deprecate his sufferings; *Father, save me from this hour*; which he had no sooner uttered, but he doth, as it were on second thoughts, recal it in these words, *But for this cause came I into the World*; and concludes, *Father, glorify thy name.* Now we must not look on this as any levity, or blameable weakness in the blessed Jesus; he knew all along what he was to suffer, and did most resolutely undergo it; but it shews us the unconceivable weight and pressure that he was to bear, which being so afflicting and contrary to nature, he could not think of without terror; yet considering the will of God, and the glory which was to redound to him from thence, he was not only content, but desirous to suffer it.

Our Saviour's constant devotion.

ANOTHER instance of his love to God, was his delight in conversing with him by prayer, which made him frequently retire himself from the world, and with the greatest devotion and pleasure spend whole nights in that heavenly exercise, though he had no sins to confess, and but few secular interests to pray for; which,
alas!

alas ! are almost the only things that are wont to drive us to our devotions : nay, we may say his whole life was a kind of prayer, a constant course of communion with God : if the sacrifice was not always offering, yet was the fire still kept alive : nor was ever the blessed Jesus surpris'd with that dullness or tepidity of spirit which we must many times wrestle with, before we can be fit for the exercise of devotion.

Our Saviour's charity to men.

I N the second place, I should speak of his love and charity towards all men ; but he who would express it, must transcribe the history of the gospel, and comment upon it : for scarce any thing is recorded to have been done or spoken by him, which was not designed for the good and advantage of some one or other. All his miraculous works were instances of his goodness as well as his power, and they benefited those on whom they were wrought, as well as they amazed the beholders. His charity was not confined to his kindred, or relations ; nor was all his kindness swallowed up in the endearments of that peculiar friendship which he carried towards the beloved disciple, but every one was his *friend* who obeyed his *holy commands*, John xv. 4. and *whosoever did the will of his Father*, the same was to him as *his brother, and sister, and mother*.

NEVER

N E V E R was any unwelcome to him who came with an honest intention, nor did he deny any request which tended to the good of those that asked it: so that what was spoken of that *Roman Emperor*, whom for his goodness they called the *darling of mankind*, was really performed by him, that never any departed from him with a heavy countenance, except that rich youth, *Mark, x.* who was sorry to hear that the kingdom of heaven stood at so high a rate, that he could not save his soul and his money too. And certainly it troubled our Saviour, to see that when a price was in his hand to get wisdom, yet he had no heart to it; the ingenuity that appeared in his first address, had already procured some kindness for him; for it is said, *and Jesus, beholding him, loved him*: but must he for his sake cut out a new way to heaven, and alter the nature of things, which make it impossible that a covetous man should be happy?

A N D what shall I speak of his meekness, who could encounter the monstrous ingratitude and dissimulation of that miscreant who betrayed him, in no harsher terms than these, *Judas, betrayest thou the son of man with a kiss?* What further evidence could we desire of his fervent and unbounded charity, than that he willingly laid down his life even for his most bitter enemies; and mingling his prayers with
his

his blood, besought the Father that his death might not be laid to their charge, but might become the means of eternal life to those very persons who procured it.

Our Saviour's purity.

THE third branch of the divine life is *purity*, which, as I said, consists in a neglect of worldly enjoyments and accommodations, and a resolute enduring of all such troubles as we meet with in the doing of our duty. Now surely if ever any person was wholly dead to all the pleasures of the natural life, it was the blessed Jesus, who seldom tasted them when they came in his way; but never stepped out of his road to seek them. Though he allowed others the comforts of wedlock, and honoured marriage with his presence, yet he chose the severity of a virgin life, and never knew the nuptial bed: and though at the same time he supplied the want of wine with a miracle, yet he would not work one for the relief of his own hunger in the wilderness. So gracious and divine was the temper of his soul, in allowing to others such lawful gratifications as himself thought good to abstain from, and supplying not only their more extreme and pressing necessities, but also their smaller and less considerable wants. We many times hear of our Saviour's sighs, and groans, and tears; but never that he laughed, and but once
that

that he rejoiced in spirit: so that through his whole life, he did exactly answer that character given of him by the prophet of old, that he was *a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief*. Nor were the troubles and disaccommodations of his life other than matters of choice; for never did there any appear on the stage of the world, with greater advantages to have raised himself to the highest secular felicity. He who could bring together such a prodigious number of fishes into his disciples net; and at another time receive that tribute from a fish which he was to pay to the temple, might easily have made himself the richest person in the world. Nay, without any money he could have maintained an army powerful enough to have jostled *Cæsar* out of his throne: having oftner than once fed several thousands with a few loaves and small fishes. But to shew how small esteem he had of all the enjoyments in the world, he chose to live in so poor and mean a condition, that *though the foxes had holes, and the birds of the air had nests, yet he, who was Lord and heir of all things, had not whereon to lay his head*: he did not frequent the courts of princes, nor affect the acquaintance and converse of great ones; but being reputed the son of a carpenter, he had fishermen, and such other poor people, for his companions, and

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lived

lived at such a rate as suited with the meanness of that condition.

Our Saviour's humility.

AND thus I am brought unawares to speak of his *humility*, the last branch of the divine life, wherein he was a most eminent pattern to us, that we might *learn of him to be meek, and lowly in heart*. I shall not now speak of that infinite condescension of the eternal son of God, in taking our nature upon him; but only reflect on our Saviour's lowly and humble deportment while he was in the world. He had none of those sins and imperfections which may justly humble the best of men; but he was so entirely swallowed up with a deep sense of the infinite perfections of God, that he appeared as nothing in his own eyes, I mean, so far as he was a creature. He considered those eminent perfections which shined in his blessed soul, as not his own, but the gifts of God; and therefore assumed nothing to himself for them, but with the profoundest humility renounced all pretences to them. Hence did he refuse that ordinary compellation of *good master*, when addressed to his human nature, by one who it seems was ignorant of his divinity: *Why callest thou me good? there is none good, but God only*. As if he had said, the goodness of any creature (and
such

such only thou takest me to be) is not worthy to be named or taken notice of; it is God alone who is originally and essentially good. He never made use of his miraculous power for vanity or ostentation; he would not gratify the curiosity of the *Jews*, with a sign from heaven, some prodigious appearance in the air: nor would he follow the advice of his countrymen and kindred, who would have had all his great works performed in the eyes of the world, for gaining him the greater fame. But when his charity had prompted him to the relief of the miserable, his humility made him many times enjoin the concealment of the miracle; and when the glory of God, and the design for which he came into the world, required the publication of them, he ascribed the honour of all to his Father, telling them, *that of himself he was able to do nothing.*

I CANNOT insist on all the instances of humility in his deportment towards men; his withdrawing himself when they would have made him a king; his subjection, not only to his blessed mother, but to her husband, during his younger years; and his submission to all the indignities and affronts, which his rude and malicious enemies did put upon him. The history of his holy life, recorded by those who conversed with him, is full of such passages

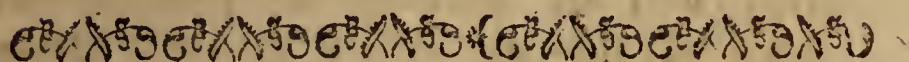
as these: and indeed the serious and attentive study of it, is the best way to get right measures of humility, and all the other parts of religion, which I have been endeavouring to describe.

BUT now, that I may lessen your trouble of reading a long letter, by making some pauses in it; let me here subjoin a prayer, that might be proper when one who had formerly entertained some false notions of religion, begins to discover what it is.

A P R A Y E R.

‘ **I**NFINITE and eternal Majesty, au-
 ‘ thor and fountain of being and blessed-
 ‘ ness, how little do we poor sinful crea-
 ‘ tures know of thee, or the way to serve
 ‘ and please thee? We talk of religion,
 ‘ and pretend unto it; but alas! how few
 ‘ are there that know and consider what it
 ‘ means? How easily do we mistake the
 ‘ affections of our nature, and the issues
 ‘ of self-love, for those divine graces which
 ‘ alone can render us acceptable in thy
 ‘ sight? It may justly grieve me to consi-
 ‘ der, that I should have wandered so long
 ‘ and contented myself so often with vain
 ‘ shadows, and false images of piety and
 ‘ religion: yet I cannot but acknowledge
 ‘ and adore thy goodness, who hast been
 ‘ pleased

' pleased in some measure to open mine
 ' eyes, and let me see what it is at which
 ' I ought to aim. I rejoice to consider
 ' what mighty improvements my nature
 ' is capable of, and what a divine temper
 ' of spirit doth shine in those whom thou
 ' art pleased to choose, and causest to ap-
 ' proach unto thee. Blessed be thine in-
 ' finite mercy, who sentest thine own son
 ' to dwell among men, and instruct them
 ' by his example as well as his laws, giv-
 ' ing them a perfect pattern of what they
 ' ought to be. O that the holy life of the
 ' blessed Jesus may be always in my
 ' thoughts, and before mine eyes, till I
 ' receive a deep sense and impression of
 ' those excellent graces that shined so emi-
 ' nently in him; and let me never cease
 ' my endeavours, till that new and divine
 ' nature prevail in my soul, and Christ
 ' be formed within me.'



The excellency and advantage of Religion.

AND now, my dear friend, having
 discovered the nature of true reli-
 gion, before I proceed any further, it will
 not perhaps be unfit to fix our meditations
 a little on the excellency and advantages

of it, that we may be excited to the more vigorous and diligent prosecution of those methods, whereby we may attain so great a felicity. - But alas! what words shall we find to express that inward satisfaction, those hidden pleasures, which can never be rightly understood, but by those holy souls who feel them? *a stranger intermeddeth not with their joy* *. Holiness is the right temper, the vigorous and healthful constitution of the soul: Its faculties had formerly been enfeebled, and disordered, so that they could not exercise their natural functions; it had wearied itself with endless tossings and rollings, and was never able to find any rest: now that distemper being removed, it feels itself well, there is a due harmony in its faculties, and a spritely vigour possesseth every part. The understanding can discern what is good, and the will can cleave unto it, the affections are not tied to the motions of sense, and the influence of external objects; but they are stirred by more divine impressions, are touched by a sense of invisible things.

The excellency of divine love.

LET us descend, if you please, into a nearer and more particular view of religion, in those several branches of it which were
named

* Prov. xiv. 10.

named before ; let us consider that love and affection wherewith holy souls are united to God, that we may see what excellency and felicity is involved in it. Love is that powerful and prevalent passion, by which all the faculties and inclinations of the soul are determined, and on which both its perfection and happiness depend. The worth and excellency of a soul, is to be measured by the object of its love : he who loveth mean and sordid things, doth thereby become base and vile ; but a noble and well-placed affection, doth advance and improve the spirit into a conformity with the perfections which it loves. The images of these do frequently present themselves unto the mind, and by a secret force and energy insinuate into the very constitution of the soul, and mould and fashion it unto their own likeness. Hence we may see how easily lovers or friends do slide into the imitation of the persons whom they affect ; and how, even before they are aware, they begin to resemble them, not only in the more considerable instances of their deportment, but also in their voice and gesture, and that which we call their mein and air ; and certainly we should as well transcribe the virtues and inward beauties of the soul, if they were the object and motive of our love. But now, as all the creatures we converse with have
C 4 their

their mixture and alloy, we are always in hazard to be sullied and corrupted by placing our affections on them. Passion doth easily blind our eyes, so that we first approve, and then imitate, the things that are blameable in them: the true way to improve and ennoble our souls, is by fixing our love on the divine perfections, that we may have them always before us, and derive an impression of them on ourselves; and *beholding with open face, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, we may be changed into the same image, from glory to glory.* He who with a generous and holy ambition hath raised his eyes towards that uncreated beauty and goodness, and fixed his affection there, is quite of another spirit, of a more excellent and heroic temper than the rest of the world, and cannot but infinitely disdain all mean and unworthy things, will not entertain any low or base thoughts, which might disparage his high and noble pretensions. Love is the greatest and most excellent thing we are masters of, and therefore it is folly and baseness to bestow it unworthily; it is indeed the only thing we can call our own; other things may be taken from us by violence, but none can ravish our love. If any thing else be counted ours, by giving our love, we give all, so far as we make over our hearts and wills, by which we possess

possess our other enjoyments. It is not possible to refuse him any thing, to whom by love we have given ourselves; nay, since it is the privilege of gifts to receive their value from the mind of the giver, and not to be measured by the event, but by the desire; he who loveth may in some sense be said not only to bestow all that he hath, but all things else which may make the beloved person happy, since he doth heartily wish them, and would really give them, if they were in his power; in which sense it is that one makes bold to say, *That divine love doth in a manner give God unto himself, by the complacency it takes in the happiness and perfection of his nature:* But though this may seem too strained an expression, certainly love is the worthiest present we can offer unto God, and it is extremely debased when we bestow it another way.

WHEN this affection is misplaced, it doth often vent itself in such expressions, as point at its genuine and proper object, and insinuate where it ought to be placed. The flattering and blasphemous terms of adoration, wherein men do sometimes express their passion, are the language of that affection which was made and designed for God: as he who is accustomed to speak to some great person, doth perhaps unawares accost another with those titles he

was wont to give to him. But certainly that passion which accounteth its object a deity, ought to be bestowed on him who really is so: those unlimited submissions, which would debase the soul, if directed to any other, will exalt and ennoble it, when placed here: those chains and cords of love, are infinitely more glorious than liberty itself; this slavery is more noble than all the empires in the world.

The advantages of divine love.

AGAIN, As divine love doth advance and elevate the soul, so it is that alone which can make it happy; the highest and most ravishing pleasures, the most solid and substantial delights, that human nature is capable of, are those which arise from the endearments of a well-placed and successful affection. That which imbitters love, and makes it ordinarily a very troublesome and hurtful passion, is the placing it on those who have not worth enough to deserve it, or affection and gratitude to requite it, or whose absence may deprive us of the pleasure of their converse, or their miseries occasion our trouble. To all these evils are they exposed, whose chief and supreme affection is placed on creatures like themselves; but the love of God delivers us from them all.

The worth of the object.

FIRST, I say, love must needs be miserable, and full of trouble and disquietude, when there is not worth and excellency enough in the object to answer the vastness of its capacity: so eager and violent a passion cannot but fret and torment the spirit, when it finds not wherewith to satisfy its cravings. And indeed so large and unbounded is its nature, that it must be extremely pinched and straitned, when confined to any creature: nothing below an infinite good can afford it room to stretch itself, and exert its vigour and activity: What is a little skin-deep beauty, or some small degrees of goodness, to match or satisfy a passion which was made for God; designed to embrace an infinite good? No wonder lovers do so hardly suffer any rival, and do not desire that others should approve their passion by imitating it: they know the scantiness and narrowness of the good which they love, that it cannot suffice two, being in effect too little for one. Hence love, *which is strong as death*, occasioneth *jealousy*, *which is cruel as the grave*; the coals whereof are coals of fire, which hath a most violent flame.

BUT divine love hath no mixture of this gall; when once the soul is fixed on that supreme and all-sufficient good, it
finds

finds so much perfection and goodness, as doth not only answer and satisfy its affection, but master and over-power it too : it finds all its love to be too faint and languid for such a noble object, and is only sorry that it can command no more. It wisheth for the flames of a *seraph*, and longs for the time when it shall be wholly melted and dissolved into love : and because it can do so little itself, it desires the assistance of the whole creation, that angels and men would concur with it in the admiration and love of those infinite perfections.

The certainty to be beloved again.

A G A I N, Love is accompanied with trouble, when it misseth a suitable return of affection : love is the most valuable thing we can bestow, and by giving it, we do in effect give all that we have ; and therefore it must needs be afflicting to find so great a gift despised, that the present which one hath made of his whole heart, cannot prevail to obtain any return. Perfect love is a kind of self-dedication, a wandering out of ourselves ; it is a kind of voluntary death, wherein the lover dies to himself, and all his own interests, not thinking of them, nor caring for them any more, and minding nothing but how he may please and gratify the party whom he loves. Thus he is quite undone
unless

unless he meets with reciprocal affection, he neglects himself, and the other hath no regard to him; but if he be beloved, he is revived, as it were, and liveth in the soul and care of the person whom he loves; and now he begins to mind his own concernments, not so much because they are his, as because the beloved is pleased to own an interest in them: he becomes dear unto himself, because he is so unto the other.

BUT why should I enlarge in so known a matter, nothing can be more clear, than that the happiness of love depends on the return it meets with; and herein the divine lover hath unspeakably the advantage, having placed his affection on him whose nature is love, whose goodness is as infinite as his being, whose mercy prevented us, when we were his enemies, therefore cannot choose but embrace us, when we are become his friends. It is utterly impossible that God should deny his love to a soul wholly devoted to him, and which desires nothing so much as to serve and please him: he cannot disdain his own image, nor the heart in which it is engraven: love is all the tribute which we can pay him, and it is the sacrifice which he will not despise.

The presence of the beloved person.

A N O T H E R thing which disturbs the pleasure of love, and renders it a miserable and unquiet passion, is absence and separation from those we love. It is not without a sensible affliction that friends do part, though for some little time; it is sad to be deprived of that society which is so delightful; our life becomes tedious, being spent in an impatient expectation of the happy hour wherein we may meet again; but if death have made the separation, as some time or other it must, this occasions a grief scarce to be paralleled by all the misfortunes of human life, and wherein we pay dear enough for the comforts of our friendship. But O how happy are those, who have placed their love on him who can never be absent from them! they need but open their eyes, and they shall every where behold the traces of his presence and glory, and converse with him whom their soul loveth: and this makes the darkest prison, or wildest desert, not only supportable, but delightful to them.

The divine love makes us partake of an infinite happiness.

I N fine, a lover is miserable if the person whom he loveth be so: they who have made an exchange of hearts by love, get thereby

thereby an interest in one another's happiness and misery : and this makes love a troublesome passion, when placed on earth. The most fortunate person hath grief enough to marr the tranquillity of his friend, and it is hard to hold out, when we are attacked on all hands, and suffer not only in our own person, but in another's. But if God were the object of our love, we should share in an infinite happiness, without any mixture or possibility of diminution : we should rejoice to behold the glory of God, and receive comfort and pleasure from all the praises wherewith men and angels do extol him. It should delight us beyond all expression to consider, that the beloved of our souls is infinitely happy in himself, and that all his enemies cannot shake or unsettle his throne : *That our God is in the heavens, and doth whatsoever he pleaseth.*

BEHOLD ! on what sure foundations his happiness is built, whose soul is possessed with divine love, whose will is transformed into the will of God, and whose greatest desire is, that his Maker should be pleased : O the peace, the rest, the satisfaction that attendeth such a temper of mind !

He that loveth God, finds sweetness in every dispensation.

WHAT an infinite pleasure must it needs be, thus as it were to lose ourselves
in

in him, and being swallowed up in the overcoming sense of his goodness, to offer ourselves a living sacrifice, always ascending unto him in flames of love. Never doth a soul know what solid joy and substantial pleasure is, till once being weary of itself, it renounces all propriety, gives itself up to the author of its being, and feels itself become a hallowed and devoted thing; and can say from an inward sense and feeling, *My beloved is mine*, (I account all his interest my own) *and I am his*: I am content to be any thing for him, and care not for myself, but that I may serve him. A person moulded into this temper, would find pleasure in all the dispensations of providence; temporal enjoyments would have another relish, when he should taste the divine goodness in them, and consider them as tokens of love sent by his dearest Lord and Maker: and chastisements, though they be not joyous but grievous, would hereby lose their sting, the rod as well as the staff would comfort him: he would snatch a kiss from the hand that was smiting him, and gather sweetness from that severity: nay, he would rejoice that though God did not the will of such a worthless and foolish creature as himself, yet he did his own will, and accomplished his own designs, which are infinitely more holy and wise.

The duties of Religion are delightful to him.

THE exercises of religion, which to others are insipid and tedious, do yield the highest pleasure and delight to souls possessed with divine love: they rejoice when they are called to * *go up to the house of the Lord*, that they may see his power and his glory, as they have formerly seen it in his sanctuary. They never think themselves so happy, as when, having retired from the world, and gotten free from the noise and hurry of affairs, and silenced all their clamorous passions, (those troublesome guests within) they have placed themselves in the presence of God, and entertain fellowship and communion with him: they delight to adore his perfections, and recount his favours, and to protest their affection to him, and tell him a thousand times that they love him; to lay out their troubles or wants before him, and disburden their hearts in his bosom. Repentance itself is a delightful exercise, when it floweth from the principle of love; there is a secret sweetness which accompanieth those tears of remorse, those meltings and relentings of a soul returning unto God, and lamenting its former unkindness.

THE severities of a holy life, and that constant watch which we are obliged to keep

* Psalm lxiii. 2.

keep over our hearts and ways, are very troublesome to those who are only ruled and acted by an external law, and have no law in their minds inclining them to the performance of their duty ; but where divine love possesseth the soul, it stands as centinel to keep out every thing that may offend the beloved, and doth disdainfully repulse those temptations which assault it : it complieth chearfully, not only with explicit commands, but with the most secret notices of the beloved's pleasure, and is ingenuous in discovering what will be most grateful and acceptable unto him : it makes mortification and self-denial change their harsh and dreadful names, and become easy, sweet and delightful things.

BUT I find this part of my letter swell bigger than I designed, (indeed who would not be tempted to dwell on so pleasant a theme) I shall endeavour to compensate it by brevity in the other points.

The excellency of charity.

THE next branch of the divine life is an universal charity and love : the excellency of this grace will be easily acknowledged ; for what can be more noble and generous than a heart enlarged to embrace the whole world, whose wishes and designs are levelled at the good and welfare of the universe,

universe, which considereth every man's interest as its own? He who loveth his neighbour as himself, can never entertain any base or injurious thought, or be wanting in expressions of bounty: he had rather suffer a thousand wrongs, than be guilty of one; and never accounts himself happy, but when some one or other hath been benefited by him: the malice or ingratitude of men is not able to resist his love; he overlooks their injuries, and pities their folly, and overcomes their evil with good, and never designs any other revenge against his most bitter and malicious enemies, than to put all the obligations he can upon them, whether they will or not. Is it any wonder that such a person be revered and admired, and accounted the darling of mankind? This inward goodness and benignity of spirit reflects a certain sweetness and serenity upon the very countenance, and makes it amiable and lovely: it inspireth the soul with a noble resolution and courage, and makes it capable of enterprizing and effecting the highest things. Those heroick actions which we are wont to read with admiration, have for the most part been the effects of the love of one's country, or of particular friendships; and certainly a more extensive and universal affection, must be much more powerful and efficacious.

The pleasure that attends charity

A G A I N, As *charity* flows from a noble and excellent temper, so it is accompanied with the greatest satisfaction and pleasure: it delights the soul to feel itself thus enlarged, and to be delivered from those disquieting as well as deformed passions, malice, hatred, and envy: and become gentle, sweet and benign. Had I my choice of all things that might tend to my present felicity, I would pitch upon this, to have my heart possessed with the greatest kindness and affection towards all men in the world. I am sure this would make me partake in all the happiness of others; their inward endowments and outward prosperity, every thing that did benefit and advantage them, would afford me comfort and pleasure: and though I should frequently meet with occasions of grief and compassion, yet there is a sweetness in commiseration which makes it infinitely more desirable than a stupid insensibility: and the consideration of that infinite goodness and wisdom which governs the world, might repress any excessive trouble for particular calamities that happen in it: and the hopes or possibility of mens after-happiness, might moderate their sorrow for their present misfortunes. Certainly, next to the love and enjoyment of God,

God, that ardent charity and affection wherewith blessed souls do embrace one another, is justly to be reckoned as the greatest felicity of those regions above; and did it universally prevail in the world, it would anticipate that blessedness, and make us taste of the joys of heaven upon earth.

The excellency of purity.

THAT which I named as a third branch of religion was *purity*, and you may remember I described it to consist in a contempt of sensual pleasures, and resoluteness to undergo those troubles and pains we may meet with in the performance of our duty: now the naming of this may suffice to recommend it as a most noble and excellent quality. There is no slavery so base, as that whereby a man becomes a drudge to his own lusts; nor any victory so glorious, as that which is obtained over them. Never can that person be capable of any thing that is noble and worthy, who is sunk in the gross and feculent pleasures of sense, or bewitched with the light and airy gratifications of fancy; but the religious soul is of a more sublime and divine temper, it knows it was made for higher things, and scorns to step aside one foot out of the way of holiness, for the obtaining any of these.

The

The delight afforded by purity.

A N D this purity is accompanied with a great deal of pleasure ; whatsoever defiles the soul, disturbs it too ; all impure delights have a sting in them, and leave smart and trouble behind them. Excess and intemperance, and all inordinate lusts, are so much enemies to the health of the body, and the interests of this present life, that a little consideration might oblige any rational man to forbear them on that very score : and if the religious person go higher, and do not only abstain from noxious pleasures, but neglect those that are innocent, this is not to be looked upon as any violent and uneasy restraint, but as the effect of better choice, that their minds are taken up in the pursuit of more sublime and refined delights, so that they cannot be concerned in these. Any person that is engaged in a violent and passionate affection, will easily forget his ordinary gratifications, will be little curious about his diet, or his bodily ease, or the diversions he was wont to delight in. No wonder then if souls over-powered with divine love, despise inferior pleasures, and be almost ready to grudge the body its necessary attendance for the common accommodations of life, judging all these impertinent to their main happiness and those

those higher enjoyments they are pursuing. As for the hardships they may meet with, they rejoice in them, as opportunities to exercise and testify their affection: and since they are able to do so little for God, they are glad of the honour to suffer for him.

The excellency of humility.

T H E last branch of religion is *humility*; and however to vulgar and carnal eyes this may appear an abject, base and despicable quality, yet really the soul of man is not capable of an higher and more noble endowment. It is a silly ignorance that begets pride; but humility arises from a nearer acquaintance with excellent things, which keeps men from doating on trifles, or admiring themselves because of some petty attainments. Noble and well educated souls have no such high opinion of riches, beauty, strength, and other such like advantages, as to value themselves for them, or despise those that want them: and as for inward worth and real goodness, the sense they have of the divine perfections, makes them think very meanly of any thing they have hitherto attained, and be still endeavouring to surmount themselves, and make nearer approaches to those infinite excellencies which they admire.

I KNOW not what thoughts people may have of humility, but I see almost every person pretending to it, and shunning such expressions and actions, as may make them be accounted arrogant and presumptuous, so that those who are most desirous of praise, will be loth to commend themselves. What are all those compliments and modes of civility, so frequent in our ordinary converse, but so many protestations of the esteem of others, and the low thoughts we have of ourselves? and must not that humility be a noble and excellent endowment, when the very shadows of it are accounted so necessary a part of good breeding?

The pleasure and sweetness of an humble temper.

A GAIN, This grace is accompanied with a great deal of happiness and tranquillity: the proud and arrogant person is a trouble to all that converse with him, but most of all unto himself: every thing is enough to vex him; but scarce any thing is sufficient to content and please him. He is ready to quarrel with every thing that falls out; as if he himself were such a considerable person, that God almighty should do every thing to gratify him, and all the creatures of heaven and earth should wait upon him, and obey his will. The leaves of high trees do shake
with

with every blast of wind, and every breath, every evil word will disquiet and torment an arrogant man: but the humble person hath the advantage when he is despised, that none can think more meanly of him, than he doth of himself; and therefore he is not troubled at the matter, but can easily bear those reproaches which wound the other to the soul. And withal, as he is less affected with injuries, so indeed he is less obnoxious unto them: *Contention, which cometh of pride*, betrays a man into a thousand inconveniences, which those of a meek and lowly temper seldom meet with. True and genuine humility begetteth both a veneration and love among all wise and discerning persons, while pride defeateth its own design, and depriveth a man of that honour it makes him pretend to.

BUT as the chief exercises of humility are those which relate unto almighty God, so these are accompanied with the greatest satisfaction and sweetness. It is impossible to express the great pleasure and delight which religious persons feel in the lowest prostrations of their soul before God, when having a deep sense of the divine majesty and glory, they sink (if I may so speak) to the bottom of their beings, and vanish and disappear in the presence of God, by a serious and affectionate acknowledgment

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of

of their own nothingness, and the shortness and imperfections of their attainments; when they understand the full sense and emphasis of the Psalmist's exclamation, *Lord, what is man!* and can utter it with the same affection. Never did any haughty and ambitious person receive the praises and applauses of men with so much pleasure, as the humble and religious do renounce them; *Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, &c.*

Thus I have spoken something of the excellencies and advantages of Religion in its several branches; but should be very injurious to the subject, did I pretend to have given any perfect account of it. Let us acquaint ourselves with it, my dear Friend, let us acquaint ourselves with it, and experience will teach us more than all that ever hath been spoken or written concerning it. But if we may suppose the soul to be already awakened unto some longing desires after so great a blessedness, it will be good to give them vent, and suffer them to issue forth in some such aspirations as these.

A P R A Y E R.

‘ **G**OOD God! what a mighty felicity is this to which we are called?
 ‘ How

‘ How graciously hast thou joined our
‘ duty and happiness together, and pre-
‘ scribed that for our work, the perform-
‘ ance whereof is a great reward? And
‘ shall such silly worms be advanced to so
‘ great a height? Wilt thou allow us
‘ to raise our eyes to thee? Wilt thou
‘ admit and accept our affection? Shall
‘ we receive the impression of thy divine
‘ excellencies, by beholding and admiring
‘ them, and partake of thy infinite bless-
‘ edness and glory, by loving thee, and
‘ rejoicing in them? O the happiness of
‘ those souls that have broken the fetters
‘ of self-love, and disentangled their af-
‘ fection from every narrow and particular
‘ good, whose understandings are enlight-
‘ ned by thy holy Spirit, and their wills
‘ enlarged to the extent of thine; who
‘ love thee above all things, and all man-
‘ kind for thy sake! I am persuaded, O
‘ God, I am persuaded that I can never
‘ be happy, till my carnal and corrupt
‘ affections be mortified, and the pride
‘ and vanity of my spirit be subdued, and
‘ till I come seriously to despise the world,
‘ and think nothing of myself. But O
‘ when shall it once be? O when wilt
‘ thou come unto me, and satisfy my soul
‘ with thy likeness, making me holy as
‘ thou art holy, even in all manner of
‘ conversation? Hast thou given me a

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‘ pro-

‘ prospect of so great a felicity, and wilt
 ‘ thou not bring me unto it? Hast thou
 ‘ excited these desires in my soul, and wilt
 ‘ thou not also satisfy them? O teach me
 ‘ to do thy will, for thou art my God;
 ‘ thy spirit is good, lead me unto the land
 ‘ of uprightness. Quicken me, O Lord,
 ‘ for thy name’s sake, and perfect that
 ‘ which concerneth me: Thy mercy, O
 ‘ Lord, endureth for ever; forsake not the
 ‘ work of thine own hands.’



*The despondent thoughts of some, newly awakened
to a right sense of things.*

I Have hitherto considered wherein true
 Religion doth consist, and how desirable
 a thing it is; but when one sees how infi-
 nitely distant the common temper and
 frame of men is from it, he may perhaps
 be ready to despond, and give over, and
 think it utterly impossible to be attained:
 he may sit down in sadness, and bemoan
 himself, and say in the anguish and bitter-
 ness of his spirit, “ They are happy in-
 deed whose souls are awakened unto the
 divine life, who are thus renewed in the
 spirit of their minds; but alas! I am
 quite of another constitution, and am
 not

“ not able to effect so mighty a change :
“ if outward observances could have done
“ the business, I might have hoped to ac-
“ quit myself by diligence and care ; but
“ since nothing but a new nature can serve
“ the turn, what am I able to do ? I
“ could bestow all my goods in oblations
“ to God, or alms to the poor, but can-
“ not command that love and charity,
“ without which this expence would pro-
“ fit me nothing. This * gift of God
“ cannot be purchased with money ; † if
“ a man should give all the substance of
“ his house for love, it would utterly be
“ contemned : I could pine and macerate
“ my body, and undergo many hardships
“ and troubles, but I cannot get all my
“ corruptions starved, nor my affections
“ wholly weaned from earthly things :
“ there are still some worldly desires lurk-
“ ing in my heart, and those vanities that
“ I have shut out of the doors, are al-
“ ways getting in by the windows. I am
“ many times convinced of my own mean-
“ ness, of the weakness of my body, and
“ the far greater weakness of my soul ;
“ but this doth rather beget indignation
“ and discontent, than true humility in
“ my spirit : and though I should come
“ to think meanly of myself, yet I cannot
“ endure that others should think so too.

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“ In

* Acts. viii. 20. † Cant. viii. 7.

“ In a word, when I reflect on my high-
 “ est and most specious attainments, I
 “ have reason to suspect, that they are all
 “ but the effects of nature, the issues of
 “ self-love acting under several disguises :
 “ and this principle is so powerful, and so
 “ deeply rooted in me, that I can never
 “ hope to be delivered from the dominion
 “ of it. I may toss and turn, as a door
 “ on the hinges, but can never get clear
 “ off, or be quite unhinged of *self*, which
 “ is still the center of all my motions : so
 “ that all the advantage I can draw from
 “ the discovery of religion, is but to see
 “ at a huge distance that felicity which I
 “ am not able to reach : like a man in
 “ a shipwreck, who discerns the land, and
 “ envies the happiness of those who are
 “ there, but thinks it impossible for him-
 “ self to get ashore.”

The unreasonableness of these fears.

THESE, I say, or such like despond-
 ing thoughts, may arise in the minds of
 those persons who begin to conceive some-
 what more of the nature and excellency
 of religion than before : they have spied
 the land, and seen that it is exceeding
 good, that it floweth with milk and honey,
 but they find they have the children of
Anak to grapple with, many powerful
 lusts and corruptions to overcome, and
 they

they fear, they shall never prevail against them. But why should we give way to such discouraging suggestions? why should we entertain such unreasonable fears, which damp our spirits, and weaken our hands, and augment the difficulties of our way? Let us encourage ourselves, my dear Friend, let us encourage ourselves with those mighty aids we are to expect in this spiritual warfare; for greater is he that is for us, than all that can rise up against us: *The eternal God is our refuge**, and underneath are the everlasting arms. *Let us be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might*, for he it is that shall tread down our enemies: God hath a tender regard unto the souls of men, and is infinitely willing to promote their welfare: he hath condescended to our weakness, and declared with an oath, that he hath no pleasure in our destruction. There is no such thing as despite or envy lodged in the bosom of that ever-blessed Being, whose name and nature is love. He created us at first in a happy condition, and now, when we are fallen from it, *He hath laid help upon one that is mighty to save†*, hath committed the care of our souls to no meaner person than the eternal Son of his love. It is he that is the Captain of our salvation, and what enemies can be too strong for us,

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when

* Deut. xxxiii. 27. † Psalm lxxxix. 19.

when we are fighting under his banners? Did not the Son of God come down from the bosom of his Father, and pitch his tabernacle amongst the sons of men, that he might recover and propagate the divine life, and restore the image of God in their souls. All the mighty works which he performed, all the sad afflictions which he sustained, had this for their scope and design; for this did he labour and toil, for this did he bleed and die: * *He was with child, he was in pain, and hath he brought forth nothing but wind, hath he wrought no deliverance in the earth? shall he not see of the travail of his soul†?* Certainly it is impossible that this great contrivance of heaven should prove abortive, that such a mighty undertaking should fail and miscarry: it hath already been effectual for the salvation of many thousands, who were once as far from the kingdom of heaven as we can suppose ourselves to be, and our || *Higb. priest continueth for ever, and is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him*: He is tender and compassionate, he knoweth our infirmities, and had experience of our temptations. † *A bruised reed will he not break, and smoking flax will he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory.* He hath
sent

* Esay xxvi. 19.

† Esay liii. 11.

|| Heb vii. 24, 25.

† Matt. xii. 20.

sent out his holy spirit, whose sweet but powerful breathings are still moving up and down in the world, to quicken and revive the souls of men, and awaken them unto the sense and feeling of those divine things for which they were made; and is ready to assist such weak and languishing creatures as we are, in our essays towards holiness and felicity; and when once it hath taken hold of a soul, and kindled in it the smallest spark of divine love, it will be sure to preserve and cherish, and bring it forth into a flame, * which many waters shall not quench, neither shall the floods be able to drown it. Whenever this day begins to dawn, and the † *day-star to arise in the heart*, it will easily dispel the powers of darkness, and make ignorance and folly, and all the corrupt and selfish affections of men, flee away as fast before it as the shades of night, when the sun cometh out of his chambers: for ‖ *the path of the just is as the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day*; § *They shall go on from strength to strength, till every one of them appear before God in Sion.*

W H Y should we think it impossible that true goodness and universal love should ever come to sway and prevail in our souls?

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* Cant. viii 7.

† 2 Peter i. 19.

‖ Prov. iv. 18.

§ Psalm lxxxiv. 7.

Is not this their primitive state and condition, their native and genuine constitution, as they came first from the hands of their maker? Sin and corruption are but usurpers, and though they have long kept the possession, yet *from the beginning it was not so*. That inordinate self-love which one would think were rooted in our very being, and interwoven with the constitution of our nature, is nevertheless of foreign extraction, and had no place at all in the state of integrity. We have still so much reason left as to condemn it; our understandings are easily convinced, that we ought to be wholly devoted to him from whom we have our being, and to love him infinitely more than ourselves, who is infinitely better than we; and our wills would readily comply with this, if they were not disordered and put out of tune: and is not he who made our souls, able to rectify and mend them again? Shall we not be able, by his assistance, to vanquish and expel those violent intruders, * *and turn unto flight the armies of the aliens?*

No sooner shall we take up arms in this holy war, but we shall have all the saints on earth, and all the angels in heaven, engaged on our party: the holy church throughout the world is daily interceding with God for the success of all such endea-

YOURS,

* Heb. xi. 34.

vours, and doubtless those heavenly hosts above are nearly concerned in the interests of religion, and infinitely desirous to see the divine life thriving and prevailing in this inferior world; and that the will of God may be done by us on earth, as it is done by themselves in heaven: and may we not then encourage ourselves, as the prophet did his servant, when he shewed him the horses and chariots of fire, * *Fear not, for they that be with us, are more than they that be against us.*

We must do what we can, and depend on the divine assistance.

AWAY then with all perplexing fears and desponding thoughts: to undertake vigorously, and rely confidently on the divine assistance, is more than half the conquest: † *Let us arise and be doing, and the Lord will be with us.* It is true, religion in the souls of men is the immediate work of God, and all our natural endeavours can neither produce it alone, nor merit those supernatural aids by which it must be wrought: the Holy Ghost must come upon us, and the power of the highest must overshadow us, before that holy thing can be begotten, and Christ be formed in us. But yet we must not expect that this whole work should be done without

* 2 Kings vi. 16, 17.

† 1 Chron. xxii. 16.

without any concurring endeavours of our own: we must not lie loitering in the ditch, and wait till omnipotence pulls us from thence: no, no, we must bestir ourselves, and actuate those powers which we have already received: we must put forth ourselves to our utmost capacities, and then we may hope that ** our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord.* All the art and industry of man cannot form the smallest herb, or make a stalk of corn to grow in the field; it is the energy of nature, and the influences of heaven, which produce this effect; it is God † *who causeth the grass to grow, and herb for the service of man*; and yet no body will say, that the labours of the husbandman are useless and unnecessary. So likewise the human soul is immediately created by God; it is he who both formeth and enliveneth the child, and yet he hath appointed the marriage-bed as the ordinary means for the propagation of mankind. Though there must intervene a stroke of omnipotence to effect this mighty change in our souls, yet ought we to do what we can to fit and prepare ourselves; for we must break up our fallow ground, ‖ and root out the weeds, and pull up the thorns, that so we may be more ready to receive the seed of grace and

* Cor. xv. 58.

† Psalm civ. 14.

‖ Jer. iv. 3.

and the dew of heaven. It is true, God hath been found of some who sought him not; he hath cast himself in their way, who were quite out of his; he hath laid hold upon them, and stopt their course on a sudden; for so was *St Paul* converted in his journey to *Damascus*. But certainly this is not God's ordinary method of dealing with men; though he hath not tied himself to means, yet he hath tied us to the use of them; and we have never more reason to expect the divine assistance, than when we are doing our utmost endeavours. It shall therefore be my next work, to shew what course we ought to take for attaining that blessed temper I have hitherto described. But here, if in delivering my own thoughts, I shall chance to differ from what is or may be said by others in this matter, I would not be thought to contradict and oppose them, any more than physicians do when they prescribe several remedies for the same disease, which perhaps are all useful and good. Every one may propose the method he judges most proper and convenient, but he doth not thereby pretend that the cure can never be effected unless that be exactly observed. I doubt it hath occasioned much unnecessary disquietude to some holy persons, that they have not found such a regular and orderly transaction in their souls, as they
have

have been described in books; that they have not passed through all those steps and stages of conversion, which some (who perhaps have felt them in themselves) have too peremptorily prescribed unto others: God hath several ways of dealing with the souls of men; and it sufficeth if the work be accomplished, whatever the methods have been.

A G A I N, Though in proposing directions, I must follow that order which the nature of things shall lead to; yet I do not mean that the same method should be so punctually observed in the practice; as if the latter rules were never to be heeded, till some considerable time have been spent in practising the former: the directions I intend are mutually conducive one to another, and are all to be performed as occasion shall serve, and we find ourselves enabled to perform them.

We must shun all manner of sin.

B U T now that I may detain you no longer, if we desire to have our souls molded to this holy frame, to become partakers of the divine nature, and have Christ formed in our hearts, we must seriously resolve and carefully endeavour to avoid and abandon all vicious and sinful practices. There can be no treaty of peace, till once we lay down these weapons
of.

of rebellion wherewith we fight against heaven: nor can we expect to have our distempers cured, if we be daily feeding on poison. Every wilful sin gives a mortal wound to the soul, and puts it at a greater distance from God and goodness; and we can never hope to have our hearts purified from corrupt affections, unless we cleanse our hands from vicious actions. Now in this case we cannot excuse ourselves by the pretence of impossibility; for sure our outward man is some way in our power, we have some command of our feet, and hands, and tongue, nay and of our thoughts and fancies too, at least so far as to divert them from impure and sinful objects, and to turn our mind another way; and we should find this power and authority much strengthened and advanced, if we were careful to manage and exercise it. In the mean while, I acknowledge our corruptions are so strong, and our temptations so many, that it will require a great deal of steadfastness and resolution, of watchfulness and care, to preserve ourselves, even in this degree of innocence and purity.

We must know what things are sinful.

A N D first, let us inform ourselves well, what those sins are from which we ought to abstain. And here we must not
take

take our measures from the maxims of the world, or the practices of those whom in charity we account good men. Most people have very light apprehensions of these things, and are not sensible of any fault, unless it be gross and flagitious, and scarce reckon any so great as that which they call *preciseness*: and those who are more serious, do many times allow themselves too great latitude and freedom. Alas! how much pride and vanity, and passion and humour, how much weakness and folly, and sin, doth every day show itself in their converse and behaviour? It may be they are humbled for it, and striving against it, and are daily gaining some ground; but then the progress is so small, and their failings so many, that we had need to choose an exacter pattern. Every one of us must answer for himself, and the practices of others will never warrant and secure us. It is the highest folly to regulate our actions by any other standard than that by which they must be judged. If ever we would *cleanse our way*, it must be by taking heed thereunto according to the word of God*: and that word which is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the

* Psalm cxix. 9.

the thoughts and intents of the heart *, will certainly discover many things to be sinful and heinous, which pass for every innocent in the eyes of the world: let us therefore imitate the Psalmist, who saith, concerning the works of men, *by the word of thy lips, I have kept myself from the paths of the destroyer* †. Let us acquaint ourselves well with the strict and holy laws of our religion: let us consider the discourses of our blessed Saviour, (especially that divine sermon on the mount) and the writings of his holy apostles, where an ingenuous and unbiaſſed mind may clearly discern those limits and bounds by which our actions ought to be confined. And then let us never look upon any sin as light and inconsiderable; but be fully perswaded, that the smallest is infinitely heinous in the sight of God, and prejudicial to the souls of men; and that if we had a right sense of things, we should be as deeply affected with the least irregularities, as now we are with the highest crimes.

We must resist the temptations to sin, by considering the evils they will draw on us.

BUT now, amongst those things which we discover to be sinful, there will be some unto which, through the disposition of our nature, or long custom, or the in-
dearments

* Heb. iv. 12.

† Psalm xvii. 4.

dearments of pleasure, we are so much wedded, that it will be like cutting off the right hand, or pulling out the right eye, to abandon them. But must we therefore sit down and wait till all difficulties be over, and every temptation be gone? This were to imitate the fool in the poet, who stood the whole day at the river side, till all the water should run by. We must not indulge our inclinations, as we do little children, till they grow weary of the thing they are unwilling to let go: we must not continue our sinful practices, in hopes that the divine grace will one day overpower our spirits, and make us hate them for their own deformity.

LET us suppose the worst, that we are utterly destitute of any supernatural principle, and want that taste by which we should discern and abhor perverse things; yet sure we are capable of some considerations which may be of force to persuade us to this reformation of our lives. If the inward deformity and heinous nature of sin cannot affect us, at least we may be frightened by those dreadful consequences that attend it: that same selfish principle which pusheth us forward unto the pursuit of sinful pleasures, will make us loth to buy them at the rate of everlasting misery. Thus we may encounter self love with its own weapons, and employ one natural inclination

clination for repressing the exorbitancies of another. Let us therefore accustom ourselves to consider seriously, what a fearful thing it must needs be to irritate and offend that infinite Being on whom we hang and depend every moment; who needs but to withdraw his mercies to make us miserable, or his assistance to make us nothing. Let us frequently remember the shortness and uncertainty of our lives, and how that after we have taken a few turns more in the world, and conversed a little longer amongst men, we must all go down unto the dark and silent grave, and carry nothing along with us but anguish and regret for all our sinful enjoyments; and then think what horror must needs seize the guilty soul, to find itself naked and all alone before the severe and impartial judge of the world, to render an exact account, not only of its more important and considerable transactions, but of every word that the tongue hath uttered, and the swiftest and most secret thought that ever passed through the mind. Let us sometimes represent unto ourselves the terrors of that dreadful day, * when the foundation of the earth shall be shaken, and the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, and the present frame of nature be dissolved,

* 2 Pet. iii. 10.

dissolved, and our eyes shall see the blessed JESUS (who came once into the world in all humility to visit us, to purchase pardon for us, and beseech us to accept of it) now appearing in the majesty of his glory, and descending from heaven in flaming fire, to take vengeance on those that have despised his mercy, and persisted in rebellion against him : when all the hidden things of darkness shall be brought to light, and the counsels of the heart shall be made manifest* : when those secret impurities and subtle frauds, whereof the world did never suspect us, shall be exposed and laid open to public view, and many thousand actions which we never dreamed to be sinful, or else had altogether forgotten, shall be charged home upon our consciences with such evident convictions of guilt, that we shall neither be able to deny nor excuse them. Then shall all the angels in heaven, and all the saints that ever lived on the earth, approve that dreadful sentence which shall be passed on wicked men ; and those who perhaps did love and esteem them when they lived in the world, shall look upon them with indignation and abhorrence, and never make one request for their deliverance. Let us consider the **eternal** punishment of damned souls, which are shadowed forth in scripture

* 1 Cor. iv. 5.

ture by metaphors taken from those things that are most terrible and grievous in the world, and yet all do not suffice to convey unto our minds any full apprehensions of them. When we have joined together the importance of all these expressions, and added unto them whatever our fancy can conceive of misery and torment, we must still remember, that all this comes infinitely short of the truth and reality of the thing.

It is true, this is a sad and melancholly subject, there is anguish and horror in the consideration of it; but sure it must be infinitely more dreadful to endure it; and such thoughts as these may be very useful to fright us from the courses that would lead us thither; how fond soever we may be of sinful pleasures, the fear of hell would make us abstain: our most forward inclinations will startle and give back, when pressed with that question in the prophet, * *Who amongst us can dwell with everlasting burnings?*

To this very purpose is it that the terrors of another world are so frequently represented in holy writ, and that in such terms as are most proper to affect and influence a carnal mind: these fears can never suffice to make any person truly good, but certainly they may restrain us from

* Isa. xxxiii. 14.

from much evil, and have often made way for more ingenuous and kindly impressions.

We must keep a constant watch over ourselves.

BUT it will not suffice to consider these things once and again, nor to form some resolutions of abandoning our sins, unless we maintain a constant guard, and be continually watching against them. Sometimes the mind is awakened to see the dismal consequences of a vicious life, and straight we are resolved to reform: but alas! it presently falleth asleep, and we lose that prospect which we had of things, and then temptations take the advantage; they solicit and importune us continually, and so do frequently engage our consent before we are aware. It is the folly and ruin of most people to live at adventure, and take part in every thing that comes in their way, seldom considering what they are about to say or do. If we would have our resolutions take effect, we must take heed unto our ways, and set a watch before the door of our lips, and examine the motions that arise in our hearts, and cause them to tell us whence they come, and whither they go; whether it be pride or passion, or any corrupt and vicious humour, that prompteth us to any design; and whether God will be offended,

fended, or any body harmed by it. And if we have no time for long reasonings, let us at least turn our eyes towards God, and place ourselves in his presence, to ask his leave and approbation for what we do: let us consider ourselves as under the all-seeing eye of that divine majesty, as in the midst of an infinite globe of light, which compasseth us about both behind and before, and pierceth to the innermost corners of our soul. The sense and remembrance of the divine presence, is the most ready and effectual means, both to discover what is unlawful, and to restrain us from it. There are some things a person could make shift to palliate or defend, and yet he dares not look almighty God in the face, and adventure upon them. If we look unto him, we shall be lightned; if we *set him always before us*, he will *guide us by his eye, and instruct us in the way wherein we ought to walk.*

We must often examine our actions.

THIS care and watchfulness over our actions, must be seconded by frequent and serious reflections upon them, not only that we may obtain the divine mercy and pardon for our sins, by an humble and sorrowful acknowledgment of them; but also that we may reinforce and strengthen our resolutions, and learn to decline or resist

resist the temptations by which we have been formerly foiled. It is an advice worthy of a Christian, though it did first drop from an heathen pen; “That before we betake ourselves to rest, we review and examine all the passages of the day, that we may have the comfort of what we have done aright, and may redress what we find to have been amiss, and make the shipwrecks of one day be as marks to direct our course in another.” This may be called the very art of virtuous living, and would contribute wonderfully to advance our reformation, and preserve our innocence. But withal we must not forget to implore the divine assistance, especially against those sins that do most easily beset us: and though it be supposed that our hearts are not yet molded into that spiritual frame, which should render our devotions acceptable, yet methinks such considerations as have been proposed to deter us from sin, may also stir us up to some natural seriousness, and make our prayers against it as earnest, at least, as they are wont to be against other calamities: and I doubt not but God, who heareth the cry of the ravens, will have some regard even to such petitions as proceed from those natural passions which himself hath implanted in us. Besides, that those prayers against sin, will be powerful engagements

ments on ourselves to excite us to watchfulness and care; and common ingenuity will make us ashamed to relapse into those faults, which we have lately bewailed before God, and against which we have begged his assistance.

It is fit to refrain ourselves in many lawful things.

THUS are we to make the first essay for recovering the divine life, by restraining the natural inclinations, that they break not out into sinful practices: but now I must add, that Christian prudence will teach us to abstain from gratifications that are not simply unlawful, and that not only that we may secure our innocence, which would be in continual hazard if we should strain our liberty to the utmost point; but also, that hereby we may weaken the forces of nature, and teach our appetites to obey. We must do with ourselves as prudent parents with their children, who cross their wills in many little indifferent things, to make them manageable and submissive in more considerable instances. He who would mortify the pride and vanity of his spirit, should stop his ears to the most deserved praises, and sometimes forbear his just vindication from the censures and aspersions of others, especially if they reflect only upon his prudence and conduct, and not on his virtue.

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and innocence. He who would check a revengeful humour, would do well to deny himself the satisfaction of representing unto others the injuries which he hath sustained; and if we would so take heed to our ways, that we sin not with our tongue, we must accustom ourselves much to solitude and silence, and sometimes with the Psalmist, *Hold our peace even from good*, till once we have gotten some command over that unruly member. Thus, I say, we may bind up our natural inclinations, and make our appetites more moderate in their cravings, by accustoming them to frequent refusals: but it is not enough to have them under violence and restraint,

We must strive to put ourselves out of love with the world.

OUR next essay must be to wean our affections from created things, and all the delights and entertainments of the lower life, which sink and depress the souls of men, and retard their motions towards God and heaven; and this we must do by possessing our minds with a deep persuasion of the vanity and emptiness of worldly enjoyments. This is an ordinary theme, and every body can make declamations upon it; but alas! how few understand and believe what they say? These notions

notions float in our brains, and come sliding off our tongues, but we have no deep impression of them on our spirits, we feel not the truth which we pretend to believe. We can tell that all the glory and splendor, all the pleasures and enjoyments of the world, are vanity and nothing; and yet these nothings take up all our thoughts, and ingross all our affections, they stifle the better inclinations of our soul, and inveigle us into many a sin. It may be, in a sober mood, we give them the slight, and resolve no longer to be deluded with them; but these thoughts seldom out-live the next temptation; the vanities which we have shut out at the door get in at a postern: there are still some pretensions, some hopes that flatter us: and after we have been frustrated a thousand times, we must continually be repeating the experiment: the least difference of circumstances is enough to delude us, and make us expect that satisfaction in one thing, which we have missed in another; but could we once get clearly off, and come to a real and serious contempt of worldly things, this were a very considerable advancement in our way. The soul of man is of a vigorous and active nature, and hath in it a raging and unextinguishable thirst, an immaterial kind of fire, always catching at some object or other, in conjunction

wherewith it thinks to be happy ; and were it once rent from the world, and all the bewitching enjoyments under the sun, it would quickly search after some higher and more excellent object, to satisfy its ardent and importunate cravings, and being no longer dazled with glittering vanities, would fix on that supreme and all-sufficient good, where it would discover such beauty and sweetness as would charm and overpower all its affections. The love of the world and the love of God, are like the scales of a balance, as the one falleth, the other doth rise : when our natural inclinations prosper, and the creature is exalted in our soul, religion is faint, and doth languish ; but when earthly objects wither away and lose their beauty, and the soul begins to cool and flag in its prosecution of them, then the seeds of grace take root, and the divine life begins to flourish and prevail. It doth therefore nearly concern us to convince ourselves of the emptiness and vanity of creature-enjoyments, and reason our heart out of love with them : let us seriously consider all that our reason, or our faith, our own experience, or the observation of others, can suggest to this effect ; let us ponder the matter over and over, and fix our thoughts on this truth, till we become really persuaded of it. Amidst all our pursuits and designs,

designs, let us stop and ask ourselves, for what end is all this? at what do I aim? can the gross and muddy pleasures of sense, or a heap of white and yellow earth, or the esteem and affection of silly creatures like myself, satisfy a rational and immortal soul? have I not tried these things already? will they have a higher relish, and yield me more contentment to-morrow than yesterday, or the next year than they did the last? There may be some little difference betwixt that which I am now pursuing, and that which I enjoyed before; but sure my former enjoyments did shew as pleasant, and promise as fair before I attained them: like the rainbow, they looked very glorious at a distance, but when I approached, I found nothing but emptiness and vapour. O what a poor thing would the life of man be, if it were capable of no higher enjoyments!

I CANNOT insist on this subject, and there is the less need, when I remember to whom I am writing. Yes (my dear Friend) you have had as great experience of the emptiness and vanity of human things, and have at present as few worldly engagements, as any that I know. I have sometimes reflected on those passages of your life wherewith you have been pleased to acquaint me; and methinks through all I can discern a design of divine provi-

dence to wean your affections from every thing here below. The trials you have had of those things which the world doats upon, have taught you to despise them ; and you have found by experience, that neither the endowments of nature, nor the advantages of fortune, are sufficient for happiness ; that every rose hath its thorn, and there may be a worm at the root of the fairest gourd ; some secret and undiscerned grief, which may make a person deserve the pity of those who perhaps do admire or envy their supposed felicity. If any earthly comforts have got too much of your heart, I think they have been your relations and friends ; and the dearest of these are removed out of the world, so that you must raise your mind towards heaven, when you would think upon them. Thus God hath provided that your heart may be loosed from the world, and that he may not have any rival in your affection, which I have always observed to be so large and unbounded, so noble and disinterested, that no inferior object can answer or deserve it.

We must do those outward actions that are commanded.

WHEN we have got our corruptions restrained, and our natural appetites and inclinations towards worldly things in some measure

measure subdued, we must proceed to such exercises as have a more immediate tendency to excite and awaken the divine life: and first let us endeavour conscientiously to perform those duties which religion doth require, and whereunto it would incline us if it did prevail in our souls. If we cannot get our inward disposition presently changed, let us study at least to regulate our outward deportment: if our hearts be not yet inflamed with divine love, let us however own our allegiance to that infinite majesty, by attending his service, and listening to his word, by speaking reverently of his name, and praising his goodness, and exhorting others to serve and obey him. If we want that charity and those bowels of compassion which we ought to have towards our neighbours, yet must not we omit any occasion of doing them good: if our hearts be haughty and proud, we must nevertheless study a modest and humble deportment. These external performances are of little value in themselves, yet may they help us forward to better things: the apostle indeed tells us, *that bodily exercise profiteth little*; but he seems not to affirm that it is altogether useless; it is always good to be doing what we can, for then God is wont to pity our weakness, and assist our feeble endeavours; and when true charity and

humility, and other graces of the divine spirit, come to take root in our souls, they will exert themselves more freely, and with less difficulty, if we have before been accustomed to express them in our outward conversations. Nor need we fear the imputation of hypocrisy, though our actions do thus somewhat outrun our affections, seeing they do still proceed from a sense of our duty, and our design is not to appear better than we are, but that we may really become so.

We must endeavour to form internal acts of devotion, charity, &c.

BUT as inward acts have a more immediate influence on the soul, to mould it to a right temper and frame, so ought we to be most frequent and sedulous in the exercise of them. Let us be often lifting up our hearts towards God ; and if we do not say that we love him above all things, let us at least acknowledge, that it is our duty, and would be our happiness so to do : let us lament the dishonour done unto him by foolish and sinful men, and applaud the praises and adorations that are given him, by that blessed and glorious company above : let us resign and yield ourselves up unto him a thousand times, to be governed by his laws, and disposed of at his pleasure : and though our stubborn

born

born hearts should start back and refuse, yet let us tell him, we are convinced that his will is always just and good, and therefore desire him to do with us whatsoever he pleaseth, whether we will or not. And so for begetting in us an universal charity towards men, we must be frequently putting up wishes for their happiness, and blessing every person that we see; and when we have done any thing for the relief of the miserable, we may second it with earnest desires that God would take care of them, and deliver them out of all their distresses.

Thus should we exercise ourselves unto godliness, and when we are employing the powers that we have, the spirit of God is wont to strike in, and elevate these acts of our soul beyond the pitch of nature, and give them a divine impression; and after the frequent reiteration of these, we shall find ourselves more inclined unto them, they flowing with greater freedom and ease.

Consideration, a great instrument of Religion.

I SHALL mention but two other means for begetting that holy and divine temper of spirit, which is the subject of the present discourse: and the first is a deep and serious consideration of the truths of our religion, and that both as to the

certainty and importance of them. The assent which is ordinarily given to divine truths is very faint and languid, very weak and ineffectual, flowing only from a blind inclination to follow that religion which is in fashion, or a lazy indifferency and unconcernedness whether things be so or not. Men are unwilling to quarrel with the religion of their country, and since all their neighbours are Christians, they are content to be so too; but they are seldom at the pains to consider the evidences of those truths, or to ponder the importance and tendency of them; and thence it is that they have so little influence on their affections and practice. Those *spiritless and paralitick thoughts* (as one doth rightly term them) are not able to move the will and direct the hand. We must therefore endeavour to work up our minds to a serious belief and full perswasion of divine truths, unto a sense and feeling of spiritual things: our thoughts must dwell upon them, till we are both convinced of them, and deeply affected with them. Let us urge forward our spirits, and make them approach the invisible world, and fix our minds upon immaterial things, till we clearly perceive that these are no dreams, nay, that all things are dreams and shadows besides them. When we look about us, and behold the beauty and magnificence

cence of this goodly frame, the order and harmony of the whole creation, let our thoughts from thence take their flight towards that omnipotent wisdom and goodness which did at first produce, and doth still establish and uphold the same. When we reflect upon ourselves, let us consider that we are not a meer piece of organized matter, a curious and well-contrived engine ; that there is more in us than flesh and blood and bones, even a divine spark, capable to know, and love, and enjoy our Maker ; and though it be now exceedingly clogged with its dull and lumpish companion, yet ere long it shall be delivered, and can subsist without the body, as well as that can do without the cloaths which we throw off at our pleasure. Let us often withdraw our thoughts from this earth, this scene of misery, and folly, and sin, and raise them towards that more vast and glorious world, whose innocent and blessed inhabitants solace themselves eternally in the divine presence, and know no other passion, but an unmixed joy, and an unbounded love. And then consider how the blessed Son of God came down to this lower world to live among us, and die for us, that he might bring us to a portion of the same felicity ; and think how he hath overcome the sharpness of death, and opened the kingdom of heaven.

heaven to all believers, and is now set down on the *right hand of the majesty on high* * ; and yet is not the less mindful of us, but receiveth our prayers, and presenteth them unto his Father, and is daily visiting his church with the influences of his spirit, as the sun reacheth us with his beams.

To beget divine love, we must consider the excellency of the divine nature.

THE serious and frequent consideration of these and such other divine truths, is the most proper method to beget that lively faith which is the foundation of religion, the spring and root of the divine life. Let me further suggest some particular subjects of meditation for producing the several branches of it. And first, to inflame our souls with the love of God, let us consider the excellency of his nature, and his love and kindness towards us. It is little we know of the divine perfections, and yet that little may suffice to fill our souls with admiration and love, to ravish our affections, as well as to raise our wonder ; for we are not meerly creatures of sense, that we should be incapable of any other affection but that which entereth by the eyes. The character of any excellent person whom we have never seen,

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* Heb. i. 3.

will many times engage our hearts, and make us hugely concerned in all his interests: and what is it, I pray you, that engages us so much to those with whom we converse? I cannot think that it is merely the colour of their face, or their comely proportions, for then we should fall in love with statues, and pictures, and flowers: these outward accomplishments may a little delight the eye, but would never be able to prevail so much on the heart, if they did not represent some vital perfection. We either see or apprehend some greatness of mind, or vigour of spirit, or sweetness of disposition, some spriteliness, or wisdom, or goodness, which charm our spirit, and command our love. Now these perfections are not obvious to the sight, the eyes can only discern the signs and effects of them; and if it be the understanding that directs the affection, and vital perfections prevail with it, certainly the excellencies of the divine nature (the traces whereof we cannot but discover in every thing we behold) would not fail to engage our hearts, if we did seriously view and regard them. Shall we not be infinitely more transported with that almighty wisdom and goodness which fills the universe, and displays itself in all the parts of the creation, which establisheth the frame of nature, and turneth the mighty wheels
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of providence, and keepeth the world from disorder and ruin, than with the faint rays of the very same perfections which we meet with in our fellow creatures? Shall we doat on the scattered pieces of a rude and imperfect picture, and never be affected with the original beauty? This were an unaccountable stupidity and blindness: whatever we find lovely in a friend, or in a saint, ought not to engross, but to elevate our affection; we should conclude with ourselves, that if there be so much sweetness in a drop, there must be infinitely more in the fountain; if there be so much splendor in a ray, what must the sun be in its glory?

NOR can we pretend the remoteness of the object, as if God were at too great a distance for our converse or our love: *he is not far from every one of us; for in him we live, and move, and have our being**: we cannot open our eyes, but we must behold some footsteps of his glory: and we cannot turn them towards him, but we shall be sure to find his intent upon us, waiting as it were to catch a look, ready to entertain the most intimate fellowship and communion with us. Let us therefore endeavour to raise our minds to the clearest conceptions of the divine nature: let us consider all that his works do declare,

OR

* Acts xvii. 27.

or his word doth discover of him unto us, and let us especially contemplate that visible representation of him which was made in our own nature by his Son, who was *the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person* *, and who appeared in the world to discover at once what God is, and what we ought to be. Let us represent him unto our minds as we find him described in the gospel ; and there we should behold the perfections of the divine nature, though covered with the vail of human infirmities ; and when we have framed unto ourselves the clearest notion that we can of a being infinite in power, in wisdom, and goodness, the author and fountain of all perfections, let us fix the eyes of our soul upon it †, that our eyes may affect our heart, and while we are musing the fire will burn ||.

We should meditate on God's goodness and love.

E S P E C I A L L Y if hereunto we add the consideration of God's favour and good-will towards us ; nothing is more powerful to engage our affection, than to find that we are beloved. Expressions of kindness are always pleasing and acceptable unto us, though the person should be otherwise mean and contemptible : but

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* Heb. i. 3.

† Lam. iii. 51.

|| Psalm xxxix. 3.

to have the love of one who is altogether lovely, to know that the glorious Majesty of heaven hath any regard unto us, how must it astonish and delight us, how must it overcome our spirits, and melt our hearts, and put our whole soul into a flame! Now as the word of God is full of the expressions of his love towards man, so all his works do loudly proclaim it; he gave us our being, and by preserving us in it, doth renew the donation every moment. He hath placed us in a rich and well furnished world, and liberally provided for all our necessities; he raineth down blessings from heaven upon us, and causeth the earth to bring forth our provision; he giveth us our food and raiment, and while we are spending the productions of one year, he is preparing for us against another. He sweetneth our lives with innumerable comforts, and gratifieth every faculties with suitable objects; the eye of his providence is always upon us, and he watcheth for our safety when we are fast asleep, neither minding him nor ourselves. But lest we should think these testimonies of his kindness less considerable, because they are the easy issues of his omnipotent power, and do not put him to any trouble or pain, he hath taken a more wonderful method to endear himself to us; he hath testified his affection to us, by suffering

fering as well as by doing; and because he could not suffer in his own nature, he assumed ours. The eternal Son of God did cloath himself with the infirmities of our flesh, and left the company of those innocent and blessed spirits, who knew well how to love and adore him, that he might dwell among men, and wrestle with the obstinancy of that rebellious race, to reduce them to their allegiance and felicity, and then to offer himself up as a sacrifice and propitiation for them. I remember one of the poets hath an ingenious fancy to express the passion wherewith he found himself overcome after a long resistance; That the god of love had shot all his golden arrows at him, but could never pierce his heart, till at length he put himself into the bow, and darted himself straight into his breast. Methinks this doth some way adumbrate God's method of dealing with men: he had long contended with a stubborn world, and thrown down many a blessing upon them, and when all his other gifts could not prevail, he at last made a gift of himself, to testify his affection, and engage theirs. The account which we have of our Saviour's life in the gospel, doth all along present us with the story of his love; all the pains that he took, and the troubles that he endured, were the wonderful effects, and uncon-

uncontrolable evidences of it. But O that last, that dismal scene! Is it possible to remember it, and question his kindness, or deny him ours? Here, here it is (my dear Friend) that we should fix our most serious and solemn thoughts, *that Christ may dwell in our hearts by faith: that we being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height: and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that we may be filled with all the fulness of God**.

WE ought also frequently to reflect on those particular tokens of favour and love, which God hath bestowed on ourselves; how long he hath born with our follies and sins, and waited to be gracious unto us; wrestling, as it were, with the stubbornness of our hearts, and essaying every method to reclaim us. We should keep a register in our minds of all the eminent blessings and deliverances we have met with; some whereof have been so conveyed, that we might clearly perceive they were not the issues of chance, but the gracious effects of the divine favour, and the signal returns of our prayers. Nor ought we to imbitter the thoughts of these things with any harsh or unworthy suspicion, as if they were designed on purpose

* Eph. iii. 17, 18, 19,

pose to enhance our guilt, and heighten our eternal damnation. No, no, my Friend, God is love, and he hath no pleasure in the ruin of his creatures: if they abuse his goodness, and turn his grace into wantonness, and thereby plunge themselves into the greater depths of guilt and misery, this is the effect of their obstinate wickedness, and not the design of those benefits which he bestows.

If these considerations had once begotten in our hearts a real love and affection towards almighty God, that would easily lead us unto the other branches of religion, and therefore I shall need say the less of them.

To beget charity, we must remember that all men are nearly related unto God.

WE shall find our hearts enlarged in charity towards men, by considering the relation wherein they stand unto God, and the impresses of his image which are stamped upon them. They are not only his creatures, the workmanship of his hands, but such of whom he taketh special care, and for whom he hath a very dear and tender regard, having laid the design of their happiness before the foundations of the world, and being willing to live and converse with them to all the ages of eternity. The meanest and most contemptible

ble person whom we behold, is the offspring of heaven, one of the children of the most high; and however unworthy he might behave himself of that relation, so long as God hath not abdicated and disowned him by a final sentence, he will have us to acknowledge him as one of his, and as such to imbrace him with a sincere and cordial affection. You know what a great concernment we are wont to have for those that do any ways belong to the person whom we love; how gladly we lay hold on every opportunity to gratify the child or servant of a friend; and sure our love towards God would as naturally spring forth in charity towards men, did we mind the interest that he is pleased to take in them, and consider that every soul is dearer unto him than all the material world; and that he did not account the blood of his Son too great a price for their redemption.

That they carry God's image upon them.

A G A I N, As all men stand in a near relation to God, so they have still so much of his image stamped upon them, as may oblige and excite us to love them: in some this image is more eminent and conspicuous, and we can discern the lovely tracks of wisdom and goodness; and though in others it is miserably sullied and defaced,

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yet it is not altogether crazed, some lineaments at least do still remain. All men are endued with rational and immortal souls, with understandings and wills capable of the highest and most excellent things; and if they be at present disordered and put out of tune by wickedness and folly, this may indeed move our compassion, but ought not in reason to extinguish our love. When we see a person of a rugged humour, and perverse disposition, full of malice and dissimulation, very foolish and very proud, it is hard to fall in love with an object that presents itself unto us under an idea so little grateful and lovely. But when we shall consider these evil qualities as the diseases and distempers of a soul, which in itself is capable of all that wisdom and goodness wherewith the best of saints have ever been adorned, and which may one day come to be raised unto such heights of perfection as shall render it a fit companion for the holy angels; this will turn our aversion into pity, and make us behold him with such resentments, as we should have when we look upon a beautiful body that was mangled with wounds, or disfigured by some loathsome disease; and however we hate the vices, we shall not cease to love the man.

To beget purity, we should consider the dignity of our nature.

IN the next place, for purifying our souls, and disintangling our affections from the pleasures and enjoyments of this lower life, let us frequently ponder the excellency and dignity of our nature, and what a shameful and unworthy thing it is for so noble and divine a creature as the soul of man, to be sunk and immersed in brutish and sensual lusts, or amused with airy and fantastical delights, and so to lose the relish of solid and spiritual pleasures; that the beast should be fed and pampered, and the man and the Christian be starved in us. Did we but mind who we are, and for what we were made, this would teach us in a right sense to reverence and stand in awe of ourselves; it would beget a modesty and shamefacedness, and make us very shy and reserved in the use of the most innocent and allowable pleasures.

We should meditate oft on the joys of heaven.

IT will be very effectual to the same purpose, that we frequently raise our minds towards heaven, and represent to our thoughts the joys that are at God's right hand, † *those pleasures that endure for evermore; for every man that hath this hope in him,*

† 1 John iii. 3.

him, purifieth himself, even as he is pure. If our heavenly country be much in our thoughts, it will make us, as *strangers and pilgrims, to abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul,* and keep ourselves *unspotted from this world,* that we may be fit for the enjoyments and felicities of the other. But then we must see that our notions of heaven be not gross and carnal, that we dream not of a *Mahometan Paradise,* nor rest on those metaphors and similitudes by which these joys are sometimes represented, for this might perhaps have a quite contrary effect: it might intangle us further in carnal affections, and we should be ready to indulge ourselves in a very liberal foretaste of those pleasures, wherein we had placed our everlasting felicity. But when we come once to conceive aright of those pure and spiritual pleasures, when the happiness we propose to ourselves is from the sight, and love, and enjoyment of God, and our minds are filled with the hopes and fore-thoughts of that blessed estate, O how mean and contemptible will all things here below appear in our eyes? with what disdain shall we reject the gross and muddy pleasures that would deprive us of those celestial enjoyments, or any way unfit and indispose us for them!

Humility

Humility arises from the consideration of our failings.

THE last branch of religion is humility, and sure we can never want matter of consideration for begetting it : all our wickednesses and imperfections, all our follies and our sins, may help to pull down that fond and overweening conceit which we are apt to entertain of ourselves. That which makes any body esteem us, is their knowledge or apprehension of some little good, and their ignorance of a great deal of evil, that may be in us ; were they thoroughly acquainted with us, they would quickly change their opinion. The thoughts that pass in our heart, in the best and most serious day of our life, being exposed unto publick view, would render us either hateful or ridiculous : and now, however, we conceal our failings from one another, yet sure we are conscious of them ourselves, and some serious reflections upon them would much qualify and allay the vanity of our spirits. Thus holy men have come really to think worse of themselves, than of any other person in the world : not but that they knew that gross and scandalous vices, are in their nature more heinous than the surprisals of temptations and infirmity ; but because they were much more intent on their own miscarriages,

carriages, than on those of their neighbours, and did consider all the aggravations of the one; and every thing that might be supposed to diminish and alleviate the other.

Thoughts of God, give us the lowest thoughts of ourselves.

BUT it is well observed by a pious writer, that the deepest and most pure humility doth not so much arise from the consideration of our own faults and defects, as from a calm and quiet contemplation of the divine purity and goodness. Our spots never appear so clearly, as when we place them before this infinite light; and we never seem less in our own eyes, than when we look down upon ourselves from on high. O how little, how nothing do all those shadows of perfection then appear, for which we are wont to value ourselves! That humility which cometh from a view of our own sinfulness and misery, is more turbulent and boisterous; but the other layeth us full as low, and wanteth nothing but that anguish and vexation, wherewith our souls are apt to boil when they are the nearest objects of our thoughts.

Prayer, another instrument of Religion, and the advantages of mental prayer.

THERE remains yet another means for begetting a holy and religious disposi-

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tion in the soul ; and that is fervent and hearty prayer. Holiness is the gift of God ; indeed the greatest gift he doth bestow, or we are capable to receive ; and he hath promised his holy spirit to those that ask it of him : in prayer we make the nearest approaches to God, and lie open to the influences of heaven : then it is that the sun of righteousness doth visit us with his directest rays, and dissipateth our darkness, and imprinteth his image on our souls. I cannot now insist on the advantages of this exercise, or the dispositions wherewith it ought to be performed ; and there is no need I should, there being so many books that treat on this subject : I shall only tell you, that as there is one sort of prayer wherein we make use of the voice, which is necessary in public, and may sometimes have its own advantages in private ; and another wherein, though we utter no sound, yet we conceive the expressions and form the words, as it were, in our minds ; so there is a third and more sublime kind of prayer, wherein the soul takes a higher flight, and having collected all its forces by long and serious meditation, it darteth itself (if I may so speak) towards God in sighs and groans, and thoughts too big for expression. As when, after a deep contemplation of the divine perfections, appearing in all his works of wonder,

wonder, it addresseth itself unto him in the profoundest adoration of his majesty and glory: or when, after sad reflections on its vileness and miscarriages, it prostrates itself before him with the greatest confusion and sorrow, not daring to lift up its eyes, or utter one word in his presence: or when, having well considered the beauty of holiness, and the unspeakable felicity of those that are truly good, it panteth after God, and sendeth up such vigorous and ardent desires, as no words can sufficiently express, continuing and repeating each of these acts as long as it finds itself upheld by the force and impulse of the previous meditation.

THIS mental prayer is of all other the most effectual to purify the soul, and dispose it unto a holy and religious temper, and may be termed the great secret of devotion, and one of the most powerful instruments of the divine life: and it may be the apostle hath a peculiar respect unto it, when he saith, that *the spirit helpeth our infirmities, making intercession for us, with groanings that cannot be uttered*, or, as the original may bear, *that cannot be worded*. Yet I do not so recommend this sort of prayer, as to supersede the use of the other; for we have so many several things to pray for, and every petition of this nature requireth so much time, and

so great an intention of spirit, that it were not easy therein to overtake them all: to say nothing that the deep sighs and heavings of the heart, which are wont to accompany it, are something oppressive to nature, and make it hard to continue long in them. But certainly a few of these inward aspirations, will do more than a great many fluent and melting expressions.

Religion is to be advanced by the same means by which it is begun; and the use of the holy sacrament towards it.

THUS (my dear Friend) I have briefly proposed the method which I judge proper for molding the soul into a holy frame; and the same means which serve to beget this divine temper, must still be practised for strengthening and advancing it; and therefore I shall recommend but one more for that purpose, and it is the frequent and conscientious use of that holy sacrament, which is peculiarly appointed to nourish and increase the spiritual life, when once it is begotten in the soul. All the instruments of religion do meet together in this ordinance; and while we address ourselves unto it, we are put to practise all the rules which were mentioned before. Then it is that we make the severest survey of our actions, and lay the strictest obligations on ourselves; then are our minds raised

to the highest contempt of the world, and every grace doth exercise itself with the greatest advantage; and then, if ever, doth the soul make its most powerful sallies towards heaven, and assault it with a holy and acceptable force. And certainly the neglect or careless performance of this duty, is one of the chief causes that bedwarfs our religion, and makes us continue of so low a size.

BUT it is time I should put a close to this letter, which is grown to a far greater bulk than at first I intended: if these poor papers can do you the smallest service, I shall think myself very happy in this undertaking; at least I am hopeful you will kindly accept the sincere endeavours of a person who would fain acquit himself of some part of that which he owes you.

A P R A Y E R.

‘ **A**ND now, O most gracious God,
‘ father and fountain of mercy and
‘ goodness, who hast blessed us with the
‘ knowledge of our happiness, and the
‘ way that leadeth unto it, excite in our
‘ souls such ardent desires after the one,
‘ as may put us forth to the diligent pro-
‘ secution of the other. Let us neither
‘ presume on our own strength, nor dis-

‘ trust thy divine assistance ; but while
‘ we are doing our utmost endeavours,
‘ teach us still to depend on thee for suc-
‘ cess. Open our eyes, O God, and teach
‘ us out of thy law. Bless us with an ex-
‘ act and tender sense of our duty, and a
‘ knowledge to discern perverse things.
‘ O that our ways were directed to keep
‘ thy statutes, then shall we not be asham-
‘ ed when we have respect unto all thy
‘ commandments. Possess our hearts
‘ with a generous and holy disdain of all
‘ those poor enjoyments which this world
‘ holdeth out to allure us, that they may
‘ never be able to inveigle our affections,
‘ or betray us to any sin : turn away our
‘ eyes from beholding vanity, and quick-
‘ en thou us in thy law. Fill our souls
‘ with such a deep sense, and full perswa-
‘ sion of those great truths which thou
‘ hast revealed in the gospel, as may in-
‘ fluence and regulate our whole conver-
‘ sation, and that the life which we hence-
‘ forth live in the flesh, we may live thro’
‘ faith in the Son of God. O that the
‘ infinite perfections of thy blessed nature,
‘ and the astonishing expressions of thy
‘ goodness and love, may conquer and
‘ overpower our hearts, that they may
‘ be constantly rising towards thee in
‘ flames of devoutest affection, and in-
‘ larging themselves in sincere and cor-
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‘ dial love towards all the world, for thy
‘ sake ; and that we may cleanse our-
‘ selves from all filthiness of flesh and
‘ spirit, perfecting holiness in thy fear,
‘ without which we can never hope to be-
‘ hold and enjoy thee. Finally, O God,
‘ grant that the consideration of what thou
‘ art, and what we ourselves are, may both
‘ humble and lay us low before thee, and
‘ also stir up in us the strongest and most
‘ ardent aspirations towards thee. We de-
‘ sire to resign and give up ourselves to
‘ the conduct of thy holy Spirit, lead us in
‘ thy truth and teach us, for thou art the
‘ God of our salvation ; guide us with thy
‘ counsel, and afterwards receive us unto
‘ glory, for the merits and intercession of
‘ thy blessed Son our Saviour. *Amen.*’





A N
A C C O U N T
O F T H E
Beginnings and Advances
O F A
S P I R I T U A L L I F E.

Written at the Desire of M. L. U. R.

Noble EUSEBES,

***** EING to entertain you with
 * B * serious purposes, I shall not in-
 * * * troduce them with any flanting
 * * * preambles, but without more
 ceremony offer you this discourse, which
 your desires engaged me to, when I retir-
 ed to this place: and indeed, if I could call
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in my thoughts, and retire my mind as much as the outward retirement I enjoy offers, or rather invites me to, I might hope to say somewhat worthy of so great a subject, and of your desires. But what shall it avail a man if he fly from all the snares of the world, and retire from all the noise and disorders in it; if he carries still his own passions with him, he carries worse company with him, and such as will be more troublesome and insnaring than any he leaves behind him. But I shall study, in an humble dependence on, and adoring of that divine Spirit, of whose methods of working I am to discourse, to set about it, without intruding into things I have not seen, or amusing you with nice subtilties, which flow either from persons vainly puffed up in their mind; or from others too much depressed with the dull and dejecting weight of melancholly.

The Spirit works inwardly on all Christians, as on the apostles; but is not irresistible.

THAT there is a new birth, and a divine inward operation of the Spirit of God, which does constantly exert itself in the souls of the adopted sons of God, but chiefly in their regeneration, is a truth so sacred and certain, that none who have any acquaintance with the inward ways of God, can so much as question it. But

the wild notions and worse practices of some high pretenders, have brought this divine truth into some disesteem and disrepute; with those who know nothing of it: yet such as feel the inward motions of it, and those gentle breathings of that good Spirit, are by so much the more kindled to a holy reverence and just zeal, for rescuing it from the neglect of some, and the abuse of others.

AND indeed it is the formal character of the new dispensation, by which it is distinguished from that of *Moses*; that in it we shall have a new heart and a new spirit put within us; that God's law shall not only be given us on tables of stone, or any outward thing like those, but shall be inwardly engraven on our hearts; that we shall be taught of God, and that his Spirit shall be poured out on all flesh.

THIS is most irreligiously restrained to the extraordinary effusion of the holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost; or to the other miraculous gifts of the Spirit in those beginnings of Christianity: this is clearly contrary both to the promises of the Old Testament, and the whole current of the New; and to nothing more than our Saviour's most divine prayer, wherein he expresses, that he was not interceding for his disciples only, but for all that should believe on his name through their word; so that

that all these sublime effects of the divine Spirit, of being one in God, that Christ might be in them, and that the love wherewith the Father loved the Son might be in them, are there prayed for in behalf of all believers ; and certainly granted them, if that blessed intercession be not made void and of no effect. To which I shall add no more on this subject, but that every one who has any experience of divine matters, or does ever review his thoughts, will often find, that though to his reason, and natural understanding, the apprehensions of some truths of God are often very clear and convincing, yet they have not that efficacy for elevating his mind, tempering his passions, or governing his actions at some times, which these same will have at other times ; of which a considering man can give no account to himself, but that at one time the Spirit of God was absent, and was at another time present with him. But this does not at all infer any advantage to these opinions, of *the irresistible efficacy, and pre-determining power of grace* ; of which many serious persons are so fond and well perswaded : but though I will not enter into a discussion of these abstruse questions, yet I judge it necessary to premise this caution, that I be not mistaken, as advancing an opinion of which I am not at all perswaded.

The Spirit is better felt than spoken of.

I WILL not enter into a strict philosophical discussion of this spiritual state, it being a thing better felt than defined; and since I haste to things more savoury and useful, will not stand too long on the clearing it in the notion, which one may very nobly discourse of, and yet be utterly a stranger to it; as no doubt a blind man may be taught philosophy and anatomy, so as to make a very exact discourse of the fabrick of the eye, and the nature of light and vision: and yet every plain simple man with two eyes hath a truer and more perceptive notion of light and vision than he hath, though perhaps not so philosophical.

Man considered in his innocence.

BUT I shall now offer you my sense of this new Birth; which that I may do, I must look back to man in his first creation, and consider the soul as it is an intellectual Being, which operates according to those impressions proposed to it. In the state of innocence *Adam* had a clear, bright and full perception of God in his glorious attributes presented to him: next to that, by a natural tendency, he inclined to love himself, and seek his own interests and satisfactions, which that refulgent impres-

impression he had of God made him see was only to be found in serving, obeying, and adoring God ; but there was that liberty given him, which was essential to his nature, that he could fix his thoughts on any impression he chose to consider. He therefore fixing his thoughts on the consideration of the sensible pleasure that was proposed to him, and not at the same time considering the impressions of God that were on his soul, did sin. Whether the fruit he eat, did infect and poison any of his organs or not, is too philosophical a curiosity to be here canvassed ; but certain it is, that the full and most glorious idea of God was much darkened, so much only remaining as might serve to awaken all men, and put them in mind of a supreme and perfect Being.

Man considered in his elapsed estate.

THIS idea being so clouded, that it had no more that commanding authority, but was become as a twilight, then our natural propensity to love ourselves took place ; and this varied into a thousand shapes, according to the various texture of the animal spirits, the brain, the blood, and many other circumstances, which concurred to make up this variety ; but generally our senses got the upper hand of our reason, we being in a tract
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of many years accustomed to receive sensible impressions without examining them, (our weak and unripened understandings not being qualified for so severe a task) and thus sensible things turn and carry us either to riches, pleasure, honours, revenge, or some subtiler things, to serve our vanities.

Man considered in his renewed state.

THIS being the natural state of man, God does not only call him out of it by those inward excitations which arise from the conscience of natural religion, and some sentiments of virtue which still dwell on our souls, though buried in much corruption; but to us Christians, he presents more convincing arguments for discovering both our diseases and the remedies proper for them; yet our appetites retain still their dominion, and we do not either thoroughly believe, seriously consider, or frequently reflect, deeply apprehend, or faithfully obey those rules the gospel offers; or if at any time the awakenings of conscience, or the powers of the natural man, do so close with those saving truths as to resolve on obeying them, yet they are soon weary of those severer thoughts, and either the enticing baits of pleasure, the more difficult practice of virtue, or the cares of this life, do extinguish

guish those heats, which do quickly die ; such persons commonly growing worse, and more hardened in sin afterwards than before : but when the Spirit of God is poured out on them, then there are presented to their understandings more lively, strong, clear, constant, and invigorated impressions, which do not only gain belief, but obtrude themselves so often, and with that energy, upon the mind of the converted man, that he is divinely overcome, and yet without the least force on his reason and will ; he seeing the greatest reason in the world for what is proposed, and chusing with the freest liberty : so that the renewed man becomes in all things another manner of person than he was formerly.

The beginnings of regeneration.

AFTER this prefacing, I come to say something more practical of the beginnings and progress of this happy change. All persons are either educated under a strict and religious instruction, or at more liberty. The former are indeed very happy, if those who take care of them, do not only sullenly dictate to them, or with a needless moroseness force upon them performances not suitable to their age, but also open unto them, in a plain familiar strain, the excellency of true religion, with
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all possible tenderness and affection, and are above all things careful that those they educate, be perswaded they themselves believe what they deliver to them, and see their lives suitable to their discourses. But where these necessary cautions are wanting, young persons are rather prejudiced against religion, than inclined to it by a severe education, which will most commonly shew itself, as soon as a few more years set them a liberty from that yoke.

The state of most young persons.

BUT even though the sense and perswasion of divine truth be formed in younger minds, and may be habituated to private devotion, and innocent practices : yet frequently all this goes off for some years, (though I know instances to the contrary, of persons whose sense of religion grew with their years, and the other improvements of their natural parts) and as young persons are allowed more liberty, their appetites and passions grow hotter and stronger, and these being inflamed by many accidents, and blown up by ill company, this person that had the seeds of piety sown in his heart, will come to give himself up to many liberties ; at first only neglecting all sacred performances, and from that advancing to foolish vanities, then

to sensual pleasures, and perhaps at length to every thing that is wicked ; yet where one hath been well formed in his youth, still somewhat will remain that makes sin uneasy ; his reason being convinced, and his conscience by a long custom brought to some sense of divine matters, will be often very troublesome to him, and disturb him mightily in the peaceable possession of his pleasures ; and thus matters may go with him for some years : but on the other hand, he that hath been left to a careless and loose education, has none of those advantages, and as few of those aggravations ; and as his sins are not of that heinousness that the other person's are, so religious discourses and thoughts have not that matter to work on in him, that they have in the other : both therefore are in a bad enough state ; the one will not let himself think seriously, lest the impressions of his education return upon him ; the other has nothing to think of, having never had a right scheme of religion set before him.

Their first awakenings.

BUT when God hath a purpose of love towards any such, as are either lost in vice, or ruined in an insensible neglect of God and divine things, he usually begins to deal with them upon great and sudden

sudden emergencies, by a sickness, some great and outward trouble, or the loss of a dear friend, which have brought on melancholly; and perhaps sometimes upon the commission of some great sin, that fills the conscience with horror: any of these cases meeting with some serious good Sermon, or the converse of a sincerely pious and affectionately devout person, or the reading of some good book, will often occasion a great excitation of mind, to consider the condition and danger such a person is in; and though I deny not but some are insensibly, and by degrees slowly wrought to a change of heart and life, (and indeed there are no rules to be given to the Almighty) yet commonly the change is notable in the first beginning; a horror for past sins, and sad apprehensions of the judgments of God, usually break in first.

Their horror for past sins.

BUT here many having laid down rules to God, raise scruples upon the degrees of this horror and conviction: upon which I shall therefore enlarge a little. Great distinction is to be made between the natural heats of our fancies, and divine affections; and there is also great variety in God's way of dealing with people; those of melancholly dispositions are apt to be swallowed up in deep sorrow, especially if

if guilty of more crying sins. And God, in tender regard to some peoples temper, age, education, or the services for which he designs them, does either engage them to his service by some sensible joy, or at least shorten the days of their mourning, by preventing them with inward consolations very soon: others, who are more stubborn and undaunted, must be deeply humbled, and by a long continued horror, made more to abhor and guard against sin. Therefore none are to measure their first regeneration, either by the vehemence, or by the continuance of their sorrow, but by the effects it produceth: if it makes them hate sin, so as most carefully to guard against it; if it makes them hate themselves, so as to become denied to all self-pleasure, and self-will, and resigned to the will of God, they are not to be scrupulous about any thing further, but to examine these carefully.

The abatement of that horror.

NOR are they to trouble themselves if they find the apprehensions of God's wrath and just judgments against sin, raise no great commotion in their thoughts; for often the renewed man will even very early come to be above those terrors of servile fear, and considering sin as a thing vile in itself, and also highly contrary both to
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the holiness and goodness of God, he hates and resists it on these more generous accounts; and if sometimes, after he is in this filial state, he has such tragical apprehensions of wrath and punishment, it is a sign he has fallen many degrees lower in the advance and stature of the perfect man; since, as it is a high pitch of purity that raises the mind to those generous thoughts of sin, so a foul relapse may render it incapable of such elevated impressions.

Sensible horror not to be much valued.

BESIDES all this, a renewed man is so far to avoid the esteeming those vehement sorrows for sin much, that he is rather to shun them, by avoiding the venting of his grief in words, or in a mournful tone; for as this quickly evaporates much of the inward and true contrition for sin, so it often feeds the life of self-will, and of being self-pleased, and makes the person conceit himself highly devout, and spend all his grief that way; so that little of it remains to be employed in a watchful guarding against the same, or the like sins; he comes to be at quiet after one of those sad weeping fits, and judges he has no more to do. But if this sorrow be fed and encreased too much by that vehemence in the affections, then follow melancholy dejection

dejections, endless scruples, perpetual anxieties ; and such persons give great trouble to those to whom they address themselves for satisfaction, taking up their time and pains, which should go to better purposes ; they themselves are likewise diverted from pursuing closely the duties of a Christian life, and become a scandal to others, who from their dejection are deterred from embracing or following that which they see attended with such a deep and constant sadness. And as all who follow a spiritual life, must be well instructed in the nature and measure of these affectionate sorrows ; so they are no less to consider well the joys and comforts they find springing up in their souls.

The caution about sensible joys.

THIS is as important a caution as any in the whole course of a spiritual life : for some coming to feel many of these inward visits, as they think them, from thence judge they have made great advances in their way to God, and at length come to swell hugely in their own conceits, imagining themselves men of seraphical devotions ; this carries them to contemn and separate from others, whom they imagine less holy ; nay, and will lead them to imagine they have strange new lights, communicated to them from the father of
lights ;

lights ; and every conceit they take up, when in these heats of temper, they imagine to be of God, and give it out as such to others. And as the abounding of these, produces the bad effects I have mentioned ; so when they are withdrawn (which must needs be very often) the mind is full of sad anxiety, much scrupulosity, and many dark fears : therefore it is fit to propose a little caution about this.

When these sensible joys abound most.

VERY often in the beginnings of conversion, before the mind be yet purified and fitted for the more sublime exercises of absolute submission, resignation, and dependence on God, many will perceive great delight in prayer, great inlightnings of mind, much fervour in pouring out words to God : and this is a bait and attractive, to train them on to those hard and severe exercises of contrition and mortification which they must go through. But these are not to be over-valued, being but common favours, and such as the heats of nature may raise ; and if they be not rightly used or esteemed, will turn to the prejudice, rather than to the advantage of the person that feels them. They are therefore to be looked on but as little gratifications to sensitive nature, and neither much to be sought after, nor accounted of.

The

The difference between sensible and spiritual joys.

BUT because there are certainly great and high consolations to be found in God, by those who diligently seek after him, great distinction is to be made between these and those; the divine joys do not rest but on a purified mind, and it requires a high sense of spirituality to be capable of them; but these flow in on minds that are yet full of dross and corruption; the divine joy is pure and serene, and rests chiefly in the superior powers, flowing from a clear understanding, that raises a noble and generous satisfaction in the will. This will indeed sometimes descend into sensitive nature, and raise great delights even there, but it begins still, and chiefly rests in the superior powers; whereas the other joys begin in sensitive nature, by some (perhaps gross) phantasm, and are blown on by words, sounds, tears, and many of those flutterings of inferior nature, from which they will perhaps ascend into the will, and beget some calmness there; but their chief seat is in the lower powers. Divine joy doth much recollect the mind, and brings it to an inward fixed contemplating of God, and sacred truths; whereas the lower gusts do lead out the mind unto words, or some other dissipating exercise: divine joy empties the mind more
of

of itself, that it may fill it with God ; it is also gentle, pure, tender-hearted, and every way suitable to the divine spirit, from whose emanations it flows. But these lower heats do often fill the mind with self-esteem, from which follow self-love, self-will, pride, contempt of others, with a great deal more of that nature. From all which it will appear how little reason there is to seek after, or over-value those natural fervours, though too many place all their religion in them ; and if in the morning they feel some of these, they judge all is done, and that they are released from thinking more of God till night, or the next stated return of worship ; never considering how little all these addresses signify, if by a constant entertaining of divine thoughts, the mind be not transformed into the same image from glory to glory, by the spirit of the Lord.

The review of our life.

A MAN being seriously awakened, is to enter into a deep examination of his heart and past actions, and not only to consider great sins, but even all lesser escapes, and all the snares that lead him to these. It is true, as he advances in a spiritual state, he will come to a more exquisite preception of sin, and feel his conscience hurt by many things, which at
first

first he did not consider, and his sense of them will be so exact, that he will feel more compunction for some lesser failings, than he did before for more heinous ones; and this will perhaps raise a scruple, as if instead of growing better, he became worse: but a little reflection and comparing his present temper with what it was before, will soon clear this. - Now, besides his first and solemn mournings for his sins, it will be an excellent rule to have his past sins brought to such a scheme, as that he may daily review it; this will mightily beat down self-conceit, and keep up an humble distrust of himself, with a dependence on God, and let him still see what he has chiefly to guard against. Now because I would have this a constant exercise, therefore I have known the casting one's life into such a scheme, and such divisions, as might both fully and in a short time present the state of his former course of life, prove a mighty help for advancing an humble and godly temper.

Our exercises before God in secret.

NEXT to this a full scheme of all the duties of a Christian life, and more particularly of those virtues that be contrary to the formerly committed sins, together with the duties of each person's particular calling, should be considered and well digested:

gested: which will both make the person see in what he is daily failing, and what he ought to labour in: this must be a daily exercise, at least till one come to an habitual sense and practice of a heavenly life. And besides this, every spiritual man is often to be exercising all divine graces in the presence of God, by framing acts of deep humility, self-resignation, and submission to God; and this not only in some general acts, but in such particular ones as are suitable to every person's condition and temper: and likewise in acts of faith, of hope, and love to God; and in none more frequently than acts of universal love to mankind; more particularly to Christians, to our countrymen, our kindred and friends, but chiefly to our enemies.

Our exercises must be genuine and not forced.

NOW one will be easily able to judge the temper of his mind, if these acts be native and genuine; for it is most certain, that as we do often command ourselves to speak words which do not flow sincerely from our hearts; so we do also force ourselves to frame these inward acts in as flat a formality: but every one that examines himself, will find quickly what his temper is by such exercises. After and above all, we must pray most earnestly to God for
his

his pardon and grace, not only in general, but in particular; confessing before him all those sins we beg may be pardoned, and asking supplies for all those sacred and civil duties we are called to in particular. And there is no exercise in the whole compass of spiritual performances, that is both more acceptable to God, more elevates the mind, and possesseth it with more generous notions, than the duty of adoring God; either with wonder contemplating his attributes and great works, or with joy recounting the many mercies he hath bestowed on mankind, chiefly those through Jesus Christ; adding to such as are common to others, a grateful remembrance of those particular blessings we have received from it.

THESE ought to be a renewed man's secret exercises before God. But he is not to judge of his seriousness by the vehemence or coldness of nature, but by the inward and hearty desires of the soul; neither is he to judge of them by the copiousness of words, or variety of different acts: for a deeply serious mind will perhaps not speak at all in private recollections, and not vary the acts about the same thing, but persist in one act with a steady fixedness.

EVERY serious person must avoid the restraining his retirements always to the

same hours, for he cannot always expect at these returns the like elevations of mind; and therefore though it be very necessary to have some times in which every one should retire, yet if they find a disorder and coldness in their thoughts, and a deadness in their affections, which may flow from very innocent causes, they are not deeply to afflict themselves for that, but should only long to get out from those restraints, which this body and the state of life we are in, bring our souls under; nor are they to continue their recollection and prayer, when in so dull a temper: for it is a very hurtful practice to accustom ourselves to a forced way of prayer and meditation: and therefore when a person finds himself unfit for one duty, let him go to another.

We must not bring ourselves under the yoke of unnecessary rules.

AND let me here add one free thing, That nothing obstructs more an advance in spirituality and joy in God, than the fettering ourselves, by some devices of our own, to rules and forms which we will always adhere to and keep up: whereas it is a certain and general truth, that there is a progress in the spiritual as well as in the natural life; so that it were a strange impertinency to think all those methods

methods that were necessary for younger and weaker capacities, must be kept up by them, when their years grow, and their faculties improve; for many forms and practices may be highly necessary in the first formation of the new man, which a higher state will supersede; and those who understand not this, but will continue in all the forms they did begin with, and think themselves in an ill condition if those become uneasy and unpleasant to them, do straiten themselves extremely, and bring on much Trouble and many scruples by this mistake. Therefore in the whole advance towards God, we are always to judge of ourselves by our humility, our self-distrust, confidence in God, compliance with his will and providence, and hearty love of his gospel, and of all mankind, particularly of our enemies; these are great, certain and constant characters of a spiritual temper: but the heats of the mind, the fervour, or frequency, or length of prayers, are things may rise and fall, when there is neither increase nor decrease of the inward man; nay, sometimes the real advances, and these appearing ones, do so much differ, that rather, on the contrary, the soul will be serving God, submitting and trusting in him in a more sublime manner, when there is little of all those feelings, and when there seems to be not

only a coldness, but an aversion in inferior nature.

Directions about our retirement.

BUT as to inward recollection, I shall add two rules; the one is, That when a serious person feels some inward enkindlings of divine love, and holy excitations to prayer and retirement, these are always to be followed, if possible; for then God does, as it were, invite the soul to a heavenly repast, and great advantages will be found in following this course constantly; but not so as to prefer this sacrifice, how sweet and full of incense soever it may be, to acts of mercy, or any other duty wherein one stands engaged. But if one cannot retire, he should as much as he can recollect his thoughts to inward acts of adoration, joy and praise: and to take care not to lose that good temper by excessive mirth or laughter, which may blow it away; but to labour to keep it up, as well as may be, and retire as soon as he can to entertain himself with those heavenly exercises to which God is inviting him.

Whole days to be spent in prayer and fasting.

ANOTHER advice is, That all persons, especially in the beginning of their conversion, have many whole days of retirement.

tirement for prayers, fasting, and serious consideration ; this must be done with regard to every one's station, and other necessary duties, and not turned to a bare formality of changing the table and diet, which, if not directed to a further end of raising the mind, signifies nothing at all : but a serious person must improve these days, by a deeper and more considerate attending to all those things that be necessary for raising him higher in a spiritual sense of divine things ; for in this new life, those that have got their minds purified to any high degree, come to have their senses exercised to discern between good and evil : and they have the divine law so written on their hearts that as the ear perceives a discord without any deep reflection, so without reflecting on any particular place of scripture, they feel the deformity of every evil thing, by a certain antipathy of their renewed natures to it. Now these days of retirement, when bestowed on spiritual exercises, do mightily raise the mind to this inward sensation ; and indeed the only sure foundation on which the superstructure of mortification and a holy life can be reared, is a deep impression of God and his attributes, chiefly of his goodness ; by which, the mind is formed into a masculine, generous, and heroical pitch of virtue, and does not

study only such a moderate degree of religion, as some think may serve to save their souls (which is a base sign of servile and mean souls) but designs an entire victory over the world, and all sinful or sensible things.

We must often recollect our minds to consider and adore God.

TO this nothing can so effectually contribute as the frequent and almost constant setting God before our eyes, which those who are in much deep recollection carry about with them continually: for those who only pray, and then leave thinking on God till the next return, declare that their praying was either purely formal, or at most, that they are but babes in spirituality; but those whose souls are deeply engaged in following after God, give not over breathing after him, because they have done with prayer, but walk in his fear all the day long: at first they must study often to raise their minds into such acts as these; *O God thou art my God. I am thine: O how do I love thee! Into thy hands I commit my spirit.* But after a course of life led as becomes a Christian, these aspirations will become so natural to the renewed man, that they will be often snatching away his thoughts from all other objects, and fixing them on God.

We

*We must not clog ourselves with any forms that
are not necessary*

BUT as one does advance to a greater degree of the stature of the perfect man, many of those forms by which he entertained himself in his retirement (I mean not only verbal, but mental forms) will become burdensome ; and instead of that spiritual joy and profit they formerly yielded, they will become painful and uneasy ; which may occasion great scruples and inward dejection of mind, and prove a mighty hindrance, if they understand not what the inward freedom of the spirit of God is, by which they are freed from all those forms and customs, which are not commanded by the laws of God, or of the land and church we live in : for such customs as we took up for our spiritual profit, (being led to them even by the spirit of God) may afterwards grow insipid and burdensome to us, and then we must lay them aside, and see what new exercises we are carried to ; for he that inwardly depends on God, will be certainly led by him into all those things by which he may advance in his way towards God. But the trouble such souls will have, is, that they judge they are going back, when they feel no more pleasure in those exercises they were once so much delighted

with: whereas it may be so far contrary to this, that they are now growing up above that milk, to need stronger food. For the constant and never-failing measure to judge of our inward state, is to see how far we rise above or sink into self-love; how entirely we are resigned to the will of God; how we do pursue and delight in all the parts and paths of a holy and christian life: if by a search into these things we perceive our condition is really better than before, we may be sure we are advancing in a Christian course. And to conclude this point, those who are not brought into a liberty of mind, from rules, forms or methods, which they laid down to themselves, are like to meet with great dejection, and to be much entangled; but this must be well cautioned, lest some hotter brains do mix with this liberty from voluntary assumed forms, a liberty from the laws of God, and of those whom he hath set over us.

What the leadings of God's Spirit are.

BUT because I have often mentioned the inward leadings of the Spirit, there is great need of explaining my meaning in that particular: and it is briefly this, That all such as are renewed, have an inward principle of a divine life in them; which, as it inclines them to all those things

things commanded by God, either by bringing them often to their remembrance, by driving the contrary objects out of their minds, by discovering the excellency of the one, and the baseness of the other ; or by an inward delectation engaging to the one, and deterring from the other ; (all which, with more of the like nature, are experienced by pure minds) so it also sets them in the methods and ways that may lead to a high pitch in those practices ; and though the general and constant methods be in scripture, yet there must be a great variety in these, considering the variety of mens tempers, complexions, educations, and circumstances. Now for our instruction in these, God gives a divine light to all that ask it of him, which suggests means and methods to them for advancing this : and they feeling these prove useful to them, may be well assured they came from God : such persons being also engaged in many things that are of great concern to them, but yet are left to their freedom, without any outward intimations of the will of God to direct them ; as in the choice of a calling, or any other thing of great importance ; if they can fully divest themselves of self-love and prepossession, and offer themselves entirely to the divine disposal, and in great humility and meekness of spirit beg direction

tion from God; he will certainly, after some time of dependence on him by prayer and fasting, clear the doubt, either by some outward determination of his providence, or by suggesting such considerations as shall incline them to that which shall be most acceptable to him, and most for their own good.

The leadings of God's Spirit guarded against enthusiasm.

SOME have magnified highly the blind and reasonless inclinations of the will, when a strong propension is felt, joined with an ardent love to God and the brethren, without any reason presented to the understanding: but this is a thing which I do not understand, and therefore dare advise none to follow it. One therefore that finds reasons brought to his mind to determine him, and does receive them with a deep, humble, and self-denied resignation to the will of God, may safely follow those suggestions as the significations of the divine pleasure: but let him also seriously take heed that he hath not set up idols in his heart, when he goes to ask counsel of the Lord, lest he answer him according to his idols.

BUT all this gives no warrant for men, upon the pretence of inspirations, to make void the laws of God and men at their plea-

pleasure ; for if all men must be left to this their pretended freedom, and be permitted to act accordingly, every bold impostor, or hot-brained enthusiast, may vouch God, and then do what he will. When we are carried to do any thing which is beyond the common duties of mankind, and extraordinary, then we are not to go upon an inward motion of the Spirit ; for no other body is bound to believe or acknowledge it : and therefore though the inward leadings of the Spirit may satisfy ourselves, because perceived by us, yet before we propose these to others, we must have some other argument to make them good by, no body being bound to receive these barely upon our own assertion.

AND thus I suppose it is clear, that this necessary doctrine of being led by the Spirit of God in all we do, gives no liberty for men to say or do what they please : for as the Scriptures are the universal law of Christians, by which all these motions are to be examined ; and the laws for those whom God hath set in authority over us, do likewise oblige us, even by the law of God, and the settled order of mankind, and the procuring the good of it ; are also constant and infallible rules, which can be superseded by no pretended inspiration, which is an imposture, if it contradict

tradict these: so all the leadings of the Spirit I have mentioned, are only in those particulars which help to the obedience of the former, or wherein we are left at liberty by them.

The leadings of God's Spirit no way contrary to reason.

I SHALL not follow this any further, because I intend not to engage in any disputing in this discourse; but only add, that it is a strange unacquaintedness with the nature of things, to say the leadings of the Spirit of God supersede reason. If by reason, be understood the trick of disputing according to the maxims of the schools, (which, I hope, is all that well-meaning persons take it to be on this occasion) it is not to be disputed: but if by reason, be to be understood the clear conviction of our faculties, it is nonsense to say the Spirit of God doth abolish reason, since its work is only to give a clearer and more full and lively conviction than we otherwise could attain to. And even those impressions which naturally dwell on our souls, are to be considered as the voice and Spirit of God, since they are certainly from God: and therefore the new accessions of illumination come only to improve and heighten these, but not to take them away.

Purity

Purity of life follows that of the heart.

AND thus far I have proposed a few things of the inward renovation of the mind, with which there must necessarily go along an outward renovation of the whole man; otherwise all the inward fervours one may feel, and all the heats that may appear in prayers or discourses, are but like the heats of poetry, with which a carnal man, in forming a divine poem, may have his fancy warmed, when there is no renovation at all on his mind; and therefore if the soul be elevated to contemplate, adore, and serve God aright, thence follows a disesteem and deniedness to ourselves, our wills, and all corporeal pleasures; and this is called by one name, *mortification*, which makes us utterly abhor all base and sinful pleasures, and despise all bodily ones, though lawful.

We must watch carefully over all our actions.

BUT because the constant impressions of sensible objects do ever strike on our organs, and our bodies do strongly influence and bias our souls, and a depraved age engages us to follow the stream, there is therefore need of great care in carrying this on. We must studiously avoid all those objects that not only enkindle sinful desires in us, but even such as lead
towards

towards these, though at ever so great a distance. We must not only guard against things more grossly evil, but against the least things we see sinful; for he that willingly complies with any sin, because he judges it not of the most heinous nature, is fairly on the way to the worst sins. We must also so contradict our sinful desires, as not only to abstain from that which is evil, but to incline to that which is good, by considering that virtue which is opposite to it, and practising it, till we come to an habitual delight in that opposition to those sins which do most easily beset us. We must also study always to be well employed, and take those necessary breathings and diversions our embodied state requires, with persons virtuous and pious; that even then when we slacken the strictness of our watching over our minds, there be not a hazard of our being overcome, or laid open to a temptation. And there is nothing more necessary than not to allow ourselves in any things, of what kind soever they be, that our consciences do witness to us is amiss; and never to study the silencing of conscience, whether it be when it deters us from any thing, or calls us to mourn for any sin we have committed; for this brings on an habitual fearing of it: and as it provokes God to withdraw his Spirit from

us, so we lose that exact sense of good and evil, which a spiritual man must study to preserve, as much as a natural man does the organs of sense. Having our minds thus delivered from the captivity of sense, and purified to an abhorrence of that which is evil, our next work must be, to delight to do the will of God, and to have a general diffused love to mankind.

Love is a principle of obedience.

AND indeed if our souls be elevated to contemplate and adore his perfections, by a necessary and inevitable consequence we shall love him; and loving him, we must always desire to please him, and delight in so doing: and besides this, our natures will be transformed into a likeness to him, by that participation of his divine nature, that we shall by a vital congruity, delight in all those things that he commands, and feel a propension to them, even when we do not reflect on the revealed will and laws of God.

We must study to have a true notion of the design of Christianity.

BUT to do this rationally, we must diligently study the Scriptures, chiefly considering the design our Saviour had on earth; not so much amusing ourselves
with

with some darker or more unintelligible phrases or passages, as entertaining our minds with the more noble, as well as the more easy parts of that heavenly doctrine: it is a great thing to have a true and noble idea of Christianity proposed to us; and not to consider it as a system of opinions, or as a rubrick of forms, or as a means only to pardon sinners, to secure them from hell, and entitle them to eternal rewards, through the death and intercession of Christ; but as a most powerful means for elevating and raising our souls above our bodies, and this lower world, with all its deceiving snares, to a constant acknowledgment, obedience, and conformity to God, and a pure sincerity of mind, with an unblemished sanctity of life; this is the design of Christianity: and our Saviour died both for the pardon of our sins, and chiefly for reconciling us to God, and uniting us to him; in order to which, the pardon of sins was necessarily previous.

HAVING considered what Christianity is in gross, it will be easy by that thread, to find out what it is in the detail of all those duties, which can never be presented in so plain, but withal so noble and authoritative a strain, as our Saviour and his inspired apostles did deliver them: therefore he that gives himself up to God,
must

must study those sacred writings with great care and affection ; and from thence set himself with all application of mind to the practice of them, depending on God's grace for his assistance in so hard, but withal so necessary a work, not trifling away all his care on some lesser and more disputable practices ; but chiefly bestowing it on the great precepts which do naturally tend to the raising of his mind to a heavenly temper: and in this every one is to study particularly those duties which have the nearest relation to his vocation, and the circumstances he is in ; avoiding, above all things, formal or pharisaical shew.

Mutual charity must be the rule of all our deportment towards our neighbours.

BUT as his love to God must be his first vital principle in this, so it must carry with it an universal charity and love to mankind. Every good man is to consider the good of the creation of God, as his secondary end in all he does. And therefore whatever calling one applies himself to, this should be his chief care, next the giving glory to God and religion, by his exemplary behaviour in it, that he serve those uses of mankind, which his calling supplies, honestly and faithfully ; and that so doing, he may with a good conscience receive



receive those returns which his employment may bring him. By this one consideration it may appear, how few there be in the world who seriously mind religion, since almost all people choose a calling only on the consideration of the advantages they may draw from it ; without once thinking how they shall glorify God, and better mankind in it.

Our love must be universal.

THIS our love must be diffused to all men ; not narrowed to one family, kingdom, or form of religion, but must spread as wide as the whole world. It is true, because our lives are short, and our activity limited, therefore there must be some to whom we owe our first and chief offices of love : but this is rather a preferring some to others, than a secluding of any from it, for we must love all men : this love we ought to proportion to the degrees of the image of God we see in them ; for if our brotherly love be raised to divine charity, we love God in our brethren, and them in God ; in which case we must increase our love, as we discern more of the image of God in them.

How this love is applied even to the most wicked persons on earth.

BUT for those in whom we can discern nothing of this image, we ought not
to

to conceive any spite or hatred, but be possessed with pity and commiseration : and I shall desire all those hot zealots, who think they have a true zeal for God, when they are enraged with fury against those who are in any error, how gross soever, to retire their minds to an inward serious contemplating of God, and attending to his voice ; and then let them see if they can reconcile those hotter thoughts with the other serious ones : they will find that the more they are filled with the fulness of God, the more meek, tender-hearted and gentle they are ; and from this they may be convinced that such heats are not of God, nor of that wisdom, which is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated. Therefore if we see any defiling themselves with all the abominations which this age wallows in, we ought indeed to express a deep and just horror at their debauching maxims and practices, but we must pity them as we would do madmen : and for those who are innocent in their course of life, but entangled with errors, we ought to have all possible tenderness for them, studying their conviction by methods suitable to the gospel of peace, and the God of love ; and not by courses that savour of a carnal, passionate, and unmortified temper, which are equally unpolitic and unchristian.

The

The submissive Spirit of a Christian to superiors.

BESIDES all this, a man that loves God, and would do honour to religion, must shew that submission to the powers set over him by God, that may declare him sincere, and that he does not pursue a faction or design in his profession of religion, that so princes be not prejudiced against religious professions and practices: and that those who are apt to take all advantages to disparage our holy faith, may not have an opportunity put into their hands to misrepresent it to the world.

God's union with all that name the name of Christ.

THIS same extended love will make us delight to join with all that worship God in all parts of religious worship, so they are not clearly contrary to his declared will; and therefore we must be extremely careful how or upon what grounds we retire ourselves from the society of those that call on God and his Son Jesus Christ. And this we must do both to shew how glad we are to unite with all men in adoring God, and also how careful we are to prevent those heats, contentions, and slacknings of religious duties, into disputes about forms and opinions, which dissolve the bands of unity, charity, and civil peace, and often end in wars
and

and fightings: the foreseeing of this made our blessed Saviour, in his prayer of intercession to the Father for us, so often pray that his disciples might be *one*; and the apostles so seriously to press this on all the churches. But alas! how has both the one and the other been forgotten by many who have indulged the heats of their fancies, and the agitations of their passions so much, that instead of the unity of the Spirit, in the bond of peace, we have an innumerable variety of pretences to the Spirit, which are managed with an unyielding roughness and bitterness: but the children of God are sons of love and peace, and not of fire and thunder; and therefore do follow after charity, and as much as is possible, and as in them lies, live in peace with all men. It is true, we must join peace and truth together; and no consideration whatsoever should make us do any thing we judge unlawful or forbidden by God.

*This union chiefly in the Christian assemblies;
especially in the Lord's Supper.*

BUT here I hold my pen, and will enter no further into this matter; adding only, that nothing doth more enflame and keep alive the spirit of true devotion, than the frequent assemblies of the saints for adoring and calling on God. Nor does
any

any part of religious worship enliven all the graces of the Spirit of God so much as the *receiving the holy Sacrament*, which is the communion of the body and blood of the Lord; (in which his death being represented to us according to that plain institution of his own, and the merits and effects of it offered to us in that communication of his body and blood, we solemnly declare our belief of these sacred truths, and our engagements to live according to his blessed doctrine and example) in which devout minds find great advantage, both in that deep serious recollection they carry along with them to that holy action, and in the happy returns which flow in on them from that Spirit whom the Son sends from the Father.

The dangers in a spiritual life : many strong temptations will assault us.

BUT there be some great dangers we must pass through in the whole course of a spiritual life. And first the enemy of our salvation, being much assisted by the strong party he has in our breasts, will study to possess us much with sad wearings in all divine retirements, and will bring all his baits and lay them before us. For obstructing this, God does very often meet young converts with such sensible joy in his ways, as to overcome these:
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and thus generally there is a strong fervor about the beginning of regeneration, which may be either natural, as most things have a strong fermenting in the beginning ; or is a particular favour of heaven for their strength against these assaults : and this will often continue so long till persons be well engaged in the ways of religion, and then it will grow less, either by the things becoming more customary, or that God withdraws those crutches, being to exercise such souls in a spiritual Warfare. But then what was said before concerning those fervors, must be well remembered : such persons must also study to inform their understandings of the several virtues, with the reasonableness, excellency and fitness of them, that so they may have rational considerations to resist the returns of those temptations that formerly prevailed over them. And one must think likewise that it is not possible to atchieve any great thing without much labour and struggling ; and therefore since no science or art is acquired without many and tedious difficulties, one must not expect to break out of the snares of Satan, and the dominion of sense and passion, without constant attention, much wrestling, and many prayers.

A false notion of the easiness of Religion.

AGAIN, Our enemy will abuse us by representing to us, that religion is an easy thing ; that we need not study to be over-pious ; that God will pity our frailties, and pass them over for his Son's sake : therefore we are not to disquiet ourselves with an over-anxious care, but living as many others do, who are accounted good men, we may be well assured of heaven in the end ; and what needs more ? This our deceitful minds will often repeat to us, to divert us from the serious and constant pursuit of a high degree of religion. But to all this we must oppose that, of loving the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, strength and mind ; and that because he is gracious we must not abuse his goodness, but become thereby the more generously afraid and ashamed of offending him ; and, not contented with some low scant measure of holiness, must be always going on to perfection : for a man truly renewed, has that inward sense of holiness, that out of love to it, and to God whose image it is, he studies nothing with more delight and earnestness, than a daily advance in it : nor has he a Mahometan notion of the reward of the next state, considering it as some external and sensible happiness, but looks on it as the filling him with all the fullness of God ; and the perfecting of his nature in every thing
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that is divine and God-like: and if his desires after that state be truly spiritual, he will study to lay hold on and pursue as many degrees of it as this state of mortality will allow of. Therefore it is an evident sign of a carnal, unrenewed and self-seeking mind, if one study to find a temper, and such low measures of repentance or a new life, as may save his soul only, and not also highly purify, and perfect it. And thus it appears how carefully this snare must be guarded against.

A disproportioned care about some duties, with a neglect of others no less necessary.

ANOTHER of our enemy's methods for obstructing, or at least corrupting the seeds of God sown in regeneration, is to work upon the temper and genius of a person, to make him spend all his care on some voluntary piece of severity or devotion, or on some part of a spiritual course, which is set up with a care disproportioned to its importance, and to the other greater duties that are by such unequal preference either wholly neglected, or but little accounted of. Thus some are very exact in their fasts, and hours of devotion; and yet are peevish, ill-natured, and not charitable to the poor. Others are very zealous for some opinions, but are not meek nor lowly in heart. Others are very careful about external performances, and neglect inward holiness and purity of heart. Those of a cholerick dispo-

sition think they are much concerned for God and his glory, if their hearts be full of a just indignation at all sin and impiety, at least at sins of such a sort which are contrary to their temper ; and so far this is good : but if either it be not universal, nor duly proportioned, or boil in rage, hatred, and cruelty against the persons of those who do such things, this is a great excess, which may produce very bad effects. Others, of a melancholly temper, place all religion perhaps in a severe uncomforted mourning for sin, with many inward scrupulous and distracting questions about themselves: and as the jealous are ever furnished with circumstances, on which that black disposition of mind works, so they will find many particulars to feed this doubting humour with : and this as it will hugely perplex them, so it will make them affect solitude, and suddenly refuse to come, and do God those services in the world they ought to do. It will also very much obstruct their progress in all spiritual exercises, and mar that inward joy they might otherwise reap from peace with God, and a good conscience. This may also end in hyochondriacal distempers, and some very scandalous effects, and very much deter others from the study of a holy life, when they see it produce such a strange change in those who follow it. Therefore every serious man must study carefully his own temper,

temper, and with great attention guard against all such things as suit too near his natural inclinations, since it is obvious how easily he may be abused and biassed in any thing that is grateful to them. And he is with a most particular care to avoid all scrupulosity flowing from some variations of his fervor and affections. The great measures of self-denial, contempt of the world, trusting in God, and being resigned to him, are those by which he must judge of himself; and for other lesser things, they rise and fall so often, on grounds so mechanical, and so far contrary to the rules of the spiritual life, that little account is to be made of them: and time is not to be spent in an anxious tossing of those questions, which are suggested either to divert us from better purposes, or to oppress us with sorrow; and therefore we are, with a just disdain, to turn away our thoughts from these, and apply them to better exercises.

Strange suggestions of wicked thoughts, a great affliction to a pious soul.

BUT of all inward trials, there is none that more disquiets a serious mind, than the injection of some impious or blasphemous thoughts of God, which are sometimes so presented to them, that they can scarce avoid them; and though they hate them, and struggle against them, yet they still fear they have some way consented to them, and will be apt to imagine they must

have a strangely defiled imagination that can receive such phantasms; or that they have highly provoked God to leave them to the tyranny of those impressions, which grow stronger by how much the more they are resisted. This I have known a torment, perhaps equal to a rack: and having had full experience of it, shall speak plainly about it. It is certain, this is one of the chief temptations of our enemy, and may produce the worst effects. But he that is assaulted with it, must consider, that it is not to be doubted, but an evil spirit can impress a phantasm on our imaginations, as well present an object to our outward senses; and that such an impression of itself is no more our act, than the hearing any wicked discourse, which, if we receive with a just horror, certainly does no way defile us: and therefore those phantasms when presented to us, but at the same time fled from, as we would do from a fiend if it appeared to us, cannot be our acts; and the great trouble we find they give us, and the horror we conceive at them, may abundantly secure us from the fears of so black a guilt.

It is true, it is safest to mourn for any secret consent we may have, perhaps, given to such motions; but they ought not to afflict us to an excess of sorrow. And when we are troubled with these, we ought not to make much ado about them, but
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divert our thoughts from too fixedly considering of them, which only drives the impression deeper : we must rather avoid them, by turning our thoughts both from them, and every thing that may have either given occasion or nourishment to them; such is an over-curious prying into mysteries, and perhaps studying to form imaginations of spiritual things, or the melancholly of a retirement, which agrees not with our tempers or way of life. And as an exhilarating the spirit, and diverting it to a more noble exercise of praising God, in spite of those suggestions, together with such other entertainments of our minds, as may quicken and rouse them into more chearfulness, is the best way to escape the pursuit of such vile thoughts; so upon the whole matter, melancholly and inward dejection of mind must be much avoided by all that engage in a Christian course of life; and if it grow too much, a physician as well as a divine, together with the help of a good, prudent, and withal modestly chearful friend, must be made use of.

A false notion of our Christian liberty.

BUT the serpent has many wiles and windings; if he cannot prevail one way, he will attempt another; if then a spiritual person be proof against melancholly, he will study to engage him to make great use of his Christian liberty, by represent-
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ing to him, that religion must not be his torment, but his joy; that Christ came eating and drinking; that much is to be allowed to a chearful temper; and that by so doing, he shews the world how pleasant a thing religion is, and so will insensibly carry him on to great levity, a trifling away of his time, and a dissipation of his thoughts; whence will follow great slacknings in all serious duties: and if this be not so soon done, the same spirit working on his natural temper, will present to his mind, perhaps in sleep, perhaps when he prays, very pretty imaginations, which he will look on as visits from God, and highly divine impressions. But in all this a spiritual man must be very cautious; and as a man that hath a discreet care of his health, will avoid every thing he finds agrees not with it; so besides the constant general rules of decency, gravity, and modesty, which all must observe, every one is to consider what things or freedoms are hurtful to him, do over-dissipate his thoughts, or unfit him for serious and spiritual exercises, which he must beware of with great diligence, and both take care that he neither hurt himself, nor offend others by his freedom; and it must appear by his frequent return to serious thoughts and discourses, that the other do not possess his heart, but are only used for a modest relaxation, that he may with the more alacrity and chearfulness

ness both turn himself, and engage others with him to those meditations and discourses: and if so, then he gives a good account of his chearfulness, and may continue in it without apprehension or scruple. As for those florid imaginations that get in upon him, he is to examine them by what hath been said before concerning the leadings of the spirit.

The great danger of Pride.

ANOTHER subtle and constant snare of the devil is, to make us swell high in our own opinions, value ourselves, our parts and services much. Perhaps these thoughts begin from a consideration of the great blessings we have received from the hands of God, and the returning praises suitable to such mercies and favours; this will gently carry a man to a secret hugging of himself, and all will turn to self-love and self will, which will plainly destroy the vitals of Religion. This is also often fed with the applauses which may be given one, and perhaps deservedly; which if he could so receive as to offer them up to God as due to him, without sacrilegiously ascribing them to himself, were a noble evidence of a mortified spirit. In opposition therefore to all this, every serious man must often consider that *he is nothing*, and *can do nothing*, but as he is *assisted by God*; and so must acknowledge God in all he does,
without

without claiming any share of praise to himself: he is also to set up the long bead-roll of his sins and infirmities, to make himself ashamed of all such vain or over-valuing thoughts: but the most noble and sublimest exercise of humility, is to be often beholding God in the glory of his attributes and perfections, which do, when duly contemplated, so empty us of all self-conceit, that we appear as nothing in our own eyes. These exercises must be therefore kept up constantly, for guarding us against this most dangerous of all snares; because, it lays open a way for all the rest, and strikes at the *root of holiness*, (which is *resignation and dependence* on God) and is commonly plagued with some sad desertion from God.

The great danger of security.

AND finally, Another subtle snare of the devil, is to make us secure, and think we have already attained and apprehended that for which we are apprehended of God; and that all our lusts and passions are so overcome and mortified, that they can stir no more, nor do us more prejudice: and this is sometimes taken up from a cessation we have perhaps enjoyed from some temptations which did formerly give us great disturbance, but do trouble us no more; and perhaps, some branch of the disposition of our body and mind is so far altered,

ed, that we need not fear much from it. Now if these suggestions prevail, we may be well assured there will follow a great slackning in all our spiritual things : and this is very like to lead either to gross failings, or at least to a spiritless deadness in all duties : and no enemy is so dangerous as when despised. Therefore we are to reject all these suggestions as deceitful charms designed to engage us to a fatal security, which alone is an evil great enough, though not accompanied with those dismal consequences which do infallibly attend it. But to obviate this, it is necessary we often consider what a great and noble thing Christianity is, and that it will still cut out work for us ; and that a dull body, and a not entirely purified nature, an evil world, beside the undiscernable workings of evil spirits, call on us to be always on our guard, to be ever doing good, and going on to perfection : and he that has a generous and true idea of our most holy religion, will be far from conceiving himself so perfect, as that there remains nothing to be done by him ; but forgetting the things that are behind, and reaching to those that are before, he will still press toward the mark, till he attain the prize of *his high calling*.

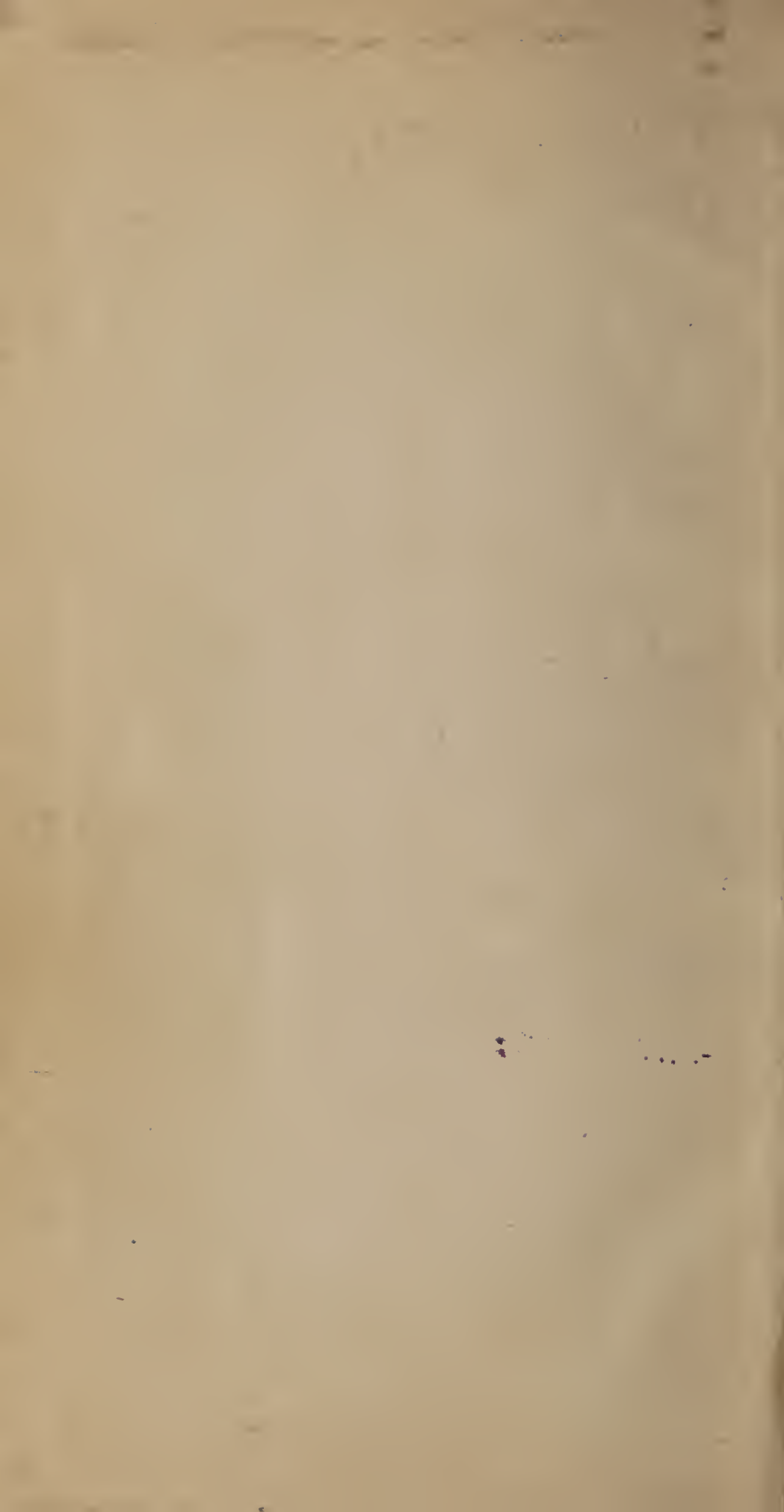
AND thus far, *noble EUSEBES*, I have complied with your desires, not at all pretend-


tending to have offered any thing to you that can either heighten your notions, or increase your desires after the better part: and I know those in you be such, that I may be justly ashamed to offer any thing of this nature to you. But I am sure that what I have proposed, is a series of certain and sacred truths, though perhaps far short of what you have attained; and not at all beautified and set off by any flights of wit or language; for as your being universally acknowledged to be amongst the greatest masters of the age in these, would have kept me from adventuring on any essays that way, had I ever so great a mind to it; so the gravity of the matter made me think it very indecent to daub it with too much art; and therefore I have perhaps bended to the other extream of flatness.

BUT here I break off: all the return I beg for this small service being the assistance of your prayers, that God may lead me on still further and further in these ways, that I being vitally united to them, and experimentally acquainted with them, may speak of them with feeling and authority to others, and may be at length perfected in them above.

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